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## A Phenomenological Study on Leading Transformational Change and Building School Culture in Elementary Schools

Tamera Jones

Concordia University - Portland, [tammy.jones@sno.wednet.edu](mailto:tammy.jones@sno.wednet.edu)

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5-2018

# A Phenomenological Study on Leading Transformational Change and Building School Culture in Elementary Schools

Tamera Jones

*Concordia University - Portland*

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Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Doctorate of Education Program

WE, THE UNDERSIGNED MEMBERS OF THE DISSERTATION COMMITTEE  
CERTIFY THAT WE HAVE READ AND APPROVE THE DISSERTATION OF

Tamera Sue Jones

CANDIDATE FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

John Mendes, Ed.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee

April Collett, Ph.D., Content Specialist

Jill Williams, Ed.D., Content Reader

A Phenomenological Study on Leading Transformational Change and Building School  
Culture in Elementary Schools

Tamera Sue Jones  
Concordia University–Portland  
College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the faculty of the College of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in  
Education Administration

John Mendes, Ed.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee

April Collett, Ph.D., Content Specialist

Jill Williams, Ed.D., Content Reader

Concordia University–Portland

2018

## **Abstract**

This study followed a phenomenological qualitative approach to understand the complexity surrounding the experiences of the elementary school principals, build understanding around how they describe their daily life of school, and how they lead transformational change and build school culture. I sought to understand the associated skills, knowledge, and behaviors that elementary school principals employed and how the relational and collegial theories of transformational, instructional, and servant leadership were applied by elementary principals in leading transformational change and building school culture. Five key themes provided insight into the experiences of these elementary principals, the associated skills, knowledge, and behaviors that they employed, and how they applied the theories of relational and collegial leadership. The identified themes included students first and foremost, people and relationships matter, leadership is approached through service, purpose, vision, values, and humility are central, and professional learning is ongoing and collaborative. Transformational change is led, and school culture is built through these five themes and by applying organizational practices creating a welcoming environment, embracing a restorative approach to behavior and discipline, acknowledging that words and language-built agency and identity, ensuring equity and inclusivity in learning for all students, and focusing on continued improvement for themselves and their school.

*Keywords:* elementary principals, phenomenology, leadership, transformational change, school culture, theories of leadership, servant leadership, service, relationships, students first, relationships, purpose, vision, humility, collaborative, professional learning.

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this dissertation to my son, Keenan Schmidt, my daughter, Keicia Hight, my parents, Leon and Carla Jones, and my number one supporter, Lori Shaw. I love you all more than I can express.

Keenan and Keicia, from when I first shared that I had applied to a doctoral program, you two became cheerleaders. You were so confident in my capabilities. You were patient as I dug in, surrounding myself with books and hours of study, research, and writing. These years took me away from my time with you both, along with your spouses, Eric and Shana, and my super special grandson, Max, who was born during my early months in the program.

Mom and Dad, thank you for modelling hard work, selfless service to others, and faith. No matter what goals I set for myself, or what crazy ideas I have had, you were there to support me and believe in me. I know you worried about the hours I had to put in to complete each step of the doctoral program and you continually emphasized that I had to take care of myself. Your endless love and support made a difference. Thank you for always believing in me.

Lori, I am not even sure where to start. You were there every step of the way. Your belief in me was incredible and I never would have finished without your care and support. So many days when I doubted myself, you said, “No, you are not quitting. You can do this.” You never knew what time I would be coming home in the evenings, if I would ever poke my head out of the home office, or if I would spend an entire weekend in my school office. You were so patient with my schedule, my ups and downs, and with the learning that consumed me. You were always here for me and I am grateful for having you in my life.

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I am grateful for the learning, and the growth I have experienced these past few years. I am forever changed. As I completed my research and data analysis, five themes came to light for me, which I see everywhere now. As I acknowledge those who have supported and influenced me as an educator and elementary principal, the five themes identified in the study capture my expressions of appreciation.

It is about students, first and foremost. Thank you to the hundreds of students who have taught me so much in my 33 years as an educator. Those who I served as a teacher, those I served as a special education director, and those I have served as a principal. You have touched my life.

People and relationships matter. The people and relationships in my life have made all the difference. My daughter, Keicia, my son, Keenan, my parents, Leon and Carla, and my number one supporter, Lori, you have been incredible. From my early mentor, Marsha Stipe, to the many colleagues I have worked with over the years, to the incredible staffs I have had the privilege to work with, and to the incredible former superintendent, Dr. Bill Mester, I am so fortunate to be surrounded by incredible people. A special thank you to my current staff, who have been with me every step of this journey, supported me, and taught me so much. Thank you also to the elementary principals who participated in the study. Thank you for allowing me to learn from you. It was a gift to spend uninterrupted time, listening to your story. I must also acknowledge my many friends who walked at my side on this path of learning, listening to my proposal and defense presentations, serving as editors, and cheering me on. I am appreciative of all you taught me.

Leadership is approached through service. The 10 elementary principals who engaged as participants in the research study modeled service, giving up their precious time to engage in interview dialogue with me. They all talked about servant leadership and service to their schools and communities. Dr. Mester, you were key in putting servant leadership at the center of the administrative team values which continue to be lived out by the principals in the school district. You taught me the importance of curiosity, slowing down, deep listening and presence, which I needed as I engaged in the interviews with the elementary principals.

Purpose, vision, values, and humility are central. It was a gift to listen to the elementary principals who participated in the research study, sharing what they held sacred, their values, purpose, and beliefs. You were all so humble in sharing how you lead transformational change and build school culture.

Professional learning is ongoing and collaborative. Joyce Russo, you were my sounding board and the person in our cohort who I could learn with and talk to. We have been a team for the past three years! I appreciate you so much.

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and grow beyond measure. The three of you pushed me, while also supporting me. I have learned so much. This professional learning has been incredible, and it will only continue.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Elementary principals serve a pivotal role in bringing about transformational change and building school culture (Fisher, Frey, & Hattie, 2016; Hattie, 2015; Kershner & McQuillan, 2016; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Wallace Foundation, 2016). Understanding how knowledge, skills, and behaviors are employed by elementary principals, and how they impact school culture, is key (Baylor, 2012; Leithwood & Montgomery, 2016; LeKamge, 2010). According to research by The Wallace Foundation (2011), “there is no documented instance of a failing school turning around without powerful leadership” (p. 2). It is crucial to understand just how elementary school principals build school culture and lead transformational change. This phenomenological study was designed to target this understanding.

### **Nature of the Proposed Research**

In August of 2014, leading researchers and educators, Dr. Fisher and Dr. Frey hosted the first Framework for Intentional Teaching (F.I.T.) Institute with the Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) in Chicago, Illinois. Educators from around the country came together to explore the F.I.T. model which combined purposeful learning, structured teaching, formative assessment, and a culture of achievement. Since the role of an elementary school principal is critical, one would assume that significant amounts of research outlined how elementary school principals lead transformational change and build school culture, how they integrate and coordinate school culture and academic press. The bulk of Fisher et al.’s (2012) research and application has been at the secondary school level. According to Dr. Fisher,

there is less information available for elementary principals about creating the culture of achievement. I think it would be very interesting to interview a number of principals about their

efforts to create these types of schools. You could use the five pillars for a priori coding, and then see if there are other categories beyond those. (personal conversation, January 16, 2017)

In this study I sought to understand how elementary school principals lead transformational change and build school culture. I sought to understand the knowledge, skills, and behaviors that elementary principals employ to lead this transformational change and build school culture.

### **Background of the Study**

Research on the role of elementary principals frequently points to the relational and collegial theories of instructional, transformational, and servant leadership, and requires a deeper level of investigation (Makolandra et al., 2009). Three relational and collegial theories of leadership that surfaced in the research literature were used to approach the study of how elementary school principals lead transformational change and build school culture:

- Servant leadership as described by Crippen (2004, 2005), Greenleaf (1970), Taylor et al. (2007), and William et al. (2009),
- Transformational leadership as described by Kershner et al. (2016), Taylor et al. (2007), and William et al. (2009), and
- Instructional leadership as described by Fisher et al. (2016), Hattie (2015), and Marzano et al. (2005).

Information on these theories of practice will be explained in Chapter 2. Information was less clear about how an elementary principal applies these leadership theories to lead an organization and support high levels of change and growth; therefore, additional research is necessary (Taylor et al., 2007).

Based upon a review of the literature and the conceptual framework using relational and collegial theories of leadership to understand how elementary school principals lead



transformational change and build school culture, there was sufficient reason for thinking that research examining the impact of the knowledge, skills, behaviors, and actions that elementary school principals employ to do so would yield educationally significant findings.

### **Problem Statement**

Research was needed to understand how elementary school principals lead transformational change and build school culture (Fisher et al., 2012). Research was necessary to understand the associated skills, knowledge, and behaviors that elementary school principals employ to lead transformational change and build school culture. Research was also necessary to understand the organizing practices or overarching ideas that elementary principals who are leading transformational change and building school culture use to describe the daily life of the school, relationships, and individuals. Finally, research was needed to understand how elementary school principals apply the relational and collegial theories of leadership: transformational, instructional, and servant leadership.

### **Study Purpose**

Through a phenomenological qualitative approach or strategy of inquiry, I sought understanding and meaning of the complexity surrounding the experiences of the elementary school principals, building understanding around how they describe their daily life of school, along with how they lead transformational change and build school culture. I sought to understand the associated skills, knowledge, and behaviors that elementary school principals employ and how the relational and collegial theories of transformational, instructional, and servant leadership are applied by elementary principals in leading transformational change and building school culture.

## **Research Questions**

The following questions guided the phenomenological research into understanding how elementary school principals lead transformational change and build school culture. Efforts to understand the relational and collegial theories of transformational, instructional, and servant leadership, the role of elementary school principals, and the complexity surrounding the experiences, comprised the center of this research. Specific questions included:

- How do elementary principals who are leading transformational change and building school culture describe their experiences and the daily life of their school and their leadership?
- How do elementary principals describe the associated skills, knowledge, and behaviors that they employ to lead transformational change and build school culture?
- How are the relational and collegial theories of leadership-transformational, instructional, and servant leadership-applied by elementary principals leading transformational change and building school culture?

## **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework in this study provided direction and understanding: organizing ideas and connecting ideas and theories surrounding how elementary principals lead transformational change and build school culture. The literature review in Chapter 2 addresses varied leadership theories; both managerial and relational-collegial theories of leadership. In the literature review I point out that managerial approaches do not produce long term results and sustainability (Kahane, 2010; Lassiter, 2012; Sinek, 2014). The relational and collegial theories of leadership emphasize community, collaboration, and a systems approach to schools and organizations and result in higher levels of impact (Hattie, 2009, p. 252). Though basic

information regarding the theories included in the conceptual framework is included below, Chapter 2 will provide more analysis regarding school culture and the leadership theories.

### **Managerial and Hierarchical Theories of Leadership**

In Chapter 2, I will go deeper into the managerial and hierarchical theories of leadership. The literature is clear that managerial and hierarchical theories of leadership do not produce long term results and sustainability (Kahane, 2010; Lassiter, 2012; Sinek, 2014). Power, hierarchies, extreme approaches, quick fixes, rewards, and punishments fail (Bennis & Goldsmith, 1997; Crippen, 2004; Lassiter, 2012). Organizational growth cannot be sustained through good management alone (Sinek, 2014).

### **Relational and Collegial Theories of Leadership**

The relational and collegial theories of leadership will be described in more detail in Chapter 2. Relational and collegial theories of leadership emphasize community, collaboration, and a systems approach for schools and organizations. In this study, I sought to understand how these theories of leadership, most specifically transformational, instructional, and servant leadership theories, are applied by elementary principals.

**Servant leadership.** The theory of servant leadership was coined by Robert K. Greenleaf in 1970 in his publication, *The Servant as Leader*. A servant leader is a servant first. This choice to serve first orients the leader to service, with aspirations to lead (Greenleaf, 1970; Greenleaf, 1977). Servant leaders are relational, share power, and care deeply about people in the organization, placing the needs of others above their own (Greenleaf, 1970; Greenleaf, 1977). In Chapter 2 I will explore the characteristics and domains of servant leadership, along with associated research.

**Transformational leadership.** Transformational leadership is traced to James McGregor Burns who first wrote about it in 1978 (Burns, 1978; Williams & Jones, 2009). A transformational leader is described as one with the “ability to inspire staff to work with more energy, commitment and purpose” (Williams & Jones, 2009, p. 32). Transformational leaders in education focus on teachers by setting vision, creating clear goals, and inspiring growth. Chapter 2 contains a richer description of transformational leadership.

**Instructional leadership.** The theory of instructional leadership is traced to the late 1970s and early 1980s (Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982). Research at that time emphasized the principal as a leader who was strong and directive, with a focus on curriculum and instruction (Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982). Instructional leaders prioritize teaching and learning in their day-to-day work. The attention, time, and focus of these principals are on learning. In the instructional leadership theory, relationships, work, and learning aligns with this attention to instruction, teaching, and learning. For instructional leaders, learning success must be clearly defined, data must be embraced, and impact must be measured (Hattie, 2015).

According to the literature reviewed, relational and collegial theories of leadership--instructional, transformational, and servant leadership theories--all have the potential to support change and growth in schools (Makolandra et al., 2009). According to Makolandra et al. (2009), if educational leaders are to make headway in understanding and meeting the challenges faced, it is necessary to look deeper into theories of instructional, transformational, and servant leadership.

### **Rationale, Relevance and Significance**

According to researcher Darling-Hammond, schools must be quickly transformed and “principals are essential to everything” (McCormick, 2017, p. 10). The task of ensuring that

schools are the best places for students to learn and grow cannot be left to chance. Elementary principals are critical for growth and improvement in their respective schools. Though literature on theories and strategies is abundant, elementary principals must choose carefully and ensure that strategies that work best are employed. This research focused on understanding how elementary school principals lead transformational change and build school culture, how they apply the relational and collegial theories of leadership--transformational, servant, and instructional--and employ knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors in their leadership.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Academic press.** Academic press is a focus on academics, “an academic sense of responsibility, intensity, and urgency (Fisher et al., 2012, p. 5).

**Coding.** Coding is used to organize, and sort data obtained in interviews, observations, and artifact collection. Coding serves as an “analytic thread that unites and integrates the major themes” in the research (University of California-Davis, n.d., p. 1). Words and phrases are used in this analysis and serve to identify themes.

**Culture of achievement.** School culture emerges from “an organization’s vision, beliefs, values, and mission” (Fisher et al., 2012, p. 6). Culture is seen in an organization’s practices as the culture is operationalized. A *culture of achievement* consists of two elements, school culture and academic press, that are aligned, integrated, and coordinated (Fisher et al., 2012, p. 6).

**Data saturation.** Data saturation is the point where “the researcher begins to see or hear the same things over and over again and no new information surfaces” (Merriam, 2009, p. 29).

**Emergent codes.** Emergent codes are a set of codes that “emerge from reading and analyzing the data” (University of California-Davis, n.d., p. 2). Emergent codes are those ideas,

concepts, actions, relationships, and meanings that come up in the data analysis coding and are different than the pre-set or priori codes.

**Framework for intentional teaching (F.I.T.).** F.I.T. is an educational model developed by Dr. Fisher and Dr. Frey, which combined purposeful learning, structured teaching, formative assessment, and a culture of achievement (Fisher et al., 2012).

**Instructional leadership theory.** The instructional leadership theory is a theory of leadership traced to the late 1970's and early 1980's, where instructional leaders prioritized teaching and learning in their day-to-day work (Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982). The attention, time, and focus of principals embracing the instructional leadership theory is on learning. In the instructional leadership theory, relationships, work, and learning aligns with this attention to instruction, teaching, and learning. For instructional leaders, learning success must be clearly defined, data must be embraced, and impact must be measured (Hattie, 2015).

**Member checking.** Member checking is a debriefing method that helps establish validity by having the individuals interviewed verify the transcript (Maxwell, 2004; Creswell, 2013).

**Pillars.** Pillars are the organizational practices of an organization. Fisher et al. (2012) identified the following pillars that are “critical to the culture of achievement” (p. 6) and communicate how a school operationalizes their mission:

**Welcoming.** The essential question related to this pillar is, “Can our school be so welcoming, so inviting, and so comfortable that every person who walks through our doors believes they are about to have an amazing experience?” (Fisher et al., 2012, p. 17).

***Do no harm.*** The intent of this pillar “is to increase the positive behavioral profile of the school in order for teachers and students to do what they do best: Learn together” (Fisher et al., 2012, p. 40).

***Choice words.*** This pillar addresses the importance that language plays in stories and learning. “The essential question is this: Is your school a place where students rediscover, develop, and use their talents, gifts, and natural capacities” (Fisher et al., 2012, p. 6).

***Never too late to learn.*** “The essential question for this pillar challenges us to examine our beliefs about education: Are we willing to do what it takes to teach all children in our school” (Fisher et al., 2012, p. 6)?

***Best school in the universe.*** This pillar causes a school to focus on continually striving to be their best. Reflection is necessary. The essential question in this pillar “requires a school to ask about what is known, both qualitatively and quantitatively, about the life of the school. Are we the best place to teach and learn” (Fisher et al., 2012, p. 6)?

**Pre-set codes.** Pre-set codes, often referred to as priori codes are the initial set of codes used in the coding process (University of California-Davis, n.d.).

**Priori codes.** Priori codes are the initial set of codes used in the coding process (University of California-Davis, n.d.).

**Purposeful sampling theory.** Purposeful sampling is a sampling method that requires the researcher to “intentionally sample a group of people that can best inform the research about the research problem under examination” (Creswell, 2013, Chapter 7, para. 4).

**Servant leadership theory.** The theory of servant leadership was coined by Robert K. Greenleaf in 1970. A servant leader is a servant first. This choice to serve first orients the leader to service, with aspirations to lead (Greenleaf, 1970; Greenleaf, 1977). Servant leaders are

relational, share power, and care deeply about people in the organization, placing the needs of others above their own (Greenleaf, 1970; Greenleaf, 1977)

**Transformational leadership theory.** Transformational leadership is traced to James McGregor Burns who first wrote about it in 1978 (Burns, 1978; Williams & Jones, 2009). A transformational leader is described as one with the “ability to inspire staff to work with more energy, commitment, and purpose” (Williams & Jones, 2009, p. 32). Transformational leaders in education focus on teachers by setting vision, creating clear goals, and inspiring growth.

### **Assumptions**

Several assumptions were critical to the meaningfulness of this study. One assumption in the study was that the identification of the knowledge, skills, and behaviors that elementary principals employ would lead to an understanding of how they lead transformational change and build school culture. Another assumption was that it is important to know how the relational and collegial theories of leadership--transformational, instructional, and servant--are applied by elementary principals. It was also assumed that clarity around how an educational leader, specifically an elementary principal, leads an organization to support this change and growth is necessary. Further, there was an assumption that transferability of theories in this phenomenological research, along with a clear understanding of the necessary knowledge, skills, and behaviors, will serve as a model for elementary school principals who desire to lead transformative change and build school culture.

### **Scope, Limitations, and Delimitations**

This phenomenological study was designed to understand how elementary school principals successfully lead transformational change and build school culture. Interviews, observations, artifacts, and field notes were used to identify the skills, knowledge, and behaviors



that elementary school principals employ, along with the practices and application of the theories of leadership.

Research conditions can result in limitations in the analysis, reporting, instrumentation, sampling, and time constraints of the study. Delimitations occur in the choices made in setting up the research, in the reasoning behind the sampling, in the instrumentation, and in the data collection tools. Precautions and planning were in place to overcome the limitations and delimitations in the research study. In this study, I used member checking, ensured prolonged engagement, and included rich and thick descriptions.

A structured approach to data collection and analysis supported transferability. I identified assumptions in the prior section and bracketed any personal bias. I ensured that participants had the associated experiences with the phenomenon and were able to articulate their lived experiences. Careful planning addressed the field issues such as access to participants and data, credibility of the researcher, and the building of trust with the elementary principal participant co-researchers. Sampling determined who was included and who was excluded. I used purposeful sampling to “intentionally sample a group of people that [could] best inform the research about the research problem under examination” (Creswell, 2013, Chapter 7, para. 4).

The participants in the study were selected from elementary schools who have engaged with the Framework for Intentional Teaching (F.I.T.), which encompasses the culture of achievement, purposeful instruction, gradual release of responsibility/structured teaching, and formative assessment. These participants have attended the F.I.T. Institute, participated in book studies, and/or visited Health Sciences High and Middle College in San Diego, where researchers Dr. Fisher and Dr. Fry serve as administrative staff. Participants were drawn from elementary schools in a school district in the Pacific Northwest. Participants included 10

elementary principals who had experience with the phenomenon, attended professional development around F.I.T., and led professional development and associated change in their own buildings. Participants all had more than 15 years in education, had served in leadership positions for at least 11 years, served as elementary principals for eight or more years, had served as an elementary principal at least five years in a single building and at least two years in their current building.

### **Summary**

This research was necessary to understand how elementary school principals lead transformational change and build school culture. Further understanding about how elementary principals employ skills, knowledge, and behaviors and the application of collegial and relational theories of leadership was also a part of this phenomenological research.

A review of the literature is found in Chapter 2. Chapter 2 will review pertinent research on the role of elementary principals and the important skills, knowledge, and behaviors they possess. I will also present the conceptual framework, which consists of the relational and collegial theories of leadership--servant, instructional, and transformational. Lastly, the literature review in Chapter 2 includes a review of the methodological research.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

In elementary schools across the nation, principals serve a pivotal role in bringing about transformational change and building school culture (Fisher, Frey, & Hattie, 2016; Hattie, 2015; Kershner & McQuillan, 2016; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Wallace Foundation, 2016). Kershner and McQuillan (2016) conducted qualitative case study research of two urban high schools, with their findings pointing to the importance of systems, relationships, and interactions. Their study also stated that principals “may represent the single most compelling leverage point” in school improvement (Kershner & McQuillan, 2016, p. 4). Similarly, The Wallace Foundation (2016) conducted narrative case study research over a 10-year period, finding that principals are “in the best position to ensure that excellence in teaching and learning...[is] spread throughout the entire school” (p. 10). With principals being a critical factor in bringing about transformational change and building school culture, it is crucial to understand just how a principal can lead change and how the relational and collegial theories of leadership--transformational, servant, and instructional--are best applied to transformational change and school culture.

In this literature review I present research on the role of the elementary principal, including the impact of principal knowledge, skills, and behaviors. The literature review in this chapter will include a variety of qualitative and quantitative research, including meta-analysis, syntheses, narrative, case studies, and data analysis regarding the role and impact of school principals and leaders. In addition, literature surrounding school and organizational culture, system approaches, instructional leadership, transformational leadership, and servant leadership are included in the review.

### **Study Topic**

It is not enough for schools to focus solely on test scores and achievement data; there must be a more systemic focus that looks to culture and the complexity that makes up a positive school community. Through program evaluation, case study, and action research, Fisher, Frey, and Pumpian (2012) noted that “specific organizational practices and structures help schools get into a cycle of continuous improvement driven by mission, inspired by vision, and operationalized by culture” (p. 2). A school culture supports student learning and guides decision making, tells an organization how individuals and groups interact and relate with one another and how they do not, what people do and what they do not do, what fits and what does not fit, what quality teaching and learning looks like and what it does not look like. Through narrative case study, observation, and action research, Fisher and Frey (2015) found that focus drives improvement and that attention to both school culture and academic press is necessary in building a culture of achievement. When principals drive the organization’s culture, practices are clearly defined, and a culture emerges to support learning and growth. Over a 15-year period that included action research in their own school, reflection, trial, and revision, along with synthesis of research findings on teaching and learning, Fisher et al. refined their work and direction. They created a school that has earned numerous awards and recognitions, including the California Department of Education Title I Academic Achievement award, 2013 California Department of Education Distinguished School award, 2014 US News Best High Schools recognition, and 2015 California Gold Ribbon School award. To build this culture of achievement, Fisher et al. used the term *pillars*, to describe their overarching ideas and practices. The philosophies of leadership can direct how the school operates and how the school operationalizes their mission. “The collective power of a school community that turns its attention to building a culture of achievement cannot be underestimated” (Fisher et al., 2012, p.

3). By focusing on the five pillars: welcoming, do no harm, choice words, it's never too late to learn, and best school in the universe, Fisher et al. claimed that principals can transform their culture to support teaching and learning at higher levels. Transformational change of this nature does not just happen. Based upon extensive meta-analysis of over 1,200 other meta-analysis studies and over 70,000 studies, Fisher, Frey and Hattie (2016) found that the role of school leadership is pivotal in transformational change. It is necessary to understand how a principal or school leader can lead this transformation and build school culture (Fisher, Frey, & Hattie, 2016).

### **Significance**

School leadership is pertinent for growth and improvement. According to research extrapolated from studies on school leadership, the determination was made that school leadership is critical for school improvement and that “there is no documented instance of a failing school turning around without powerful leadership” (Wallace Foundation, 2011, p. 2). Further research by the Wallace Foundation (2013) found that school leaders create conditions for improvement in teaching and learning. With the world's future in the care of educators and administrators, the task of ensuring that schools are the best places for students to learn and grow cannot be left to chance. Theories and strategies abound, but leaders must ensure that strategies that work are employed. “Whether a school operates effectively or not increases or decreases a student's chances of academic success” (Marzano et al., 2005, p. 3). Marzano et al. (2005) explained in their meta-analysis regarding the relationship of school leaders and student achievement that the principal is the single most influential person in a school (p. 7). Branch, Hanushek, and Rivkin (2013) studied extensive school data in their Texas School Project through the University of Texas, finding that effective leaders improve the learning climate and

associated student learning and ineffective leaders have a negative effect on the learning climate and associated student learning and achievement.

The focus of this phenomenological research was on understanding how elementary school principals described their approach to leading change in their schools and how the relational and collegial theories of leadership--transformational, servant, and instructional--were applied to transformational change and school culture. The research identified the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors that elementary school principals employed to lead this change.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Given the importance of effective school leadership, one would assume that significant amounts of research outlined how elementary school principals could be most effective, but this is not the case (Fisher, 2017). The absence exhibits a gap in the literature, revealing a need for further investigation. Dr. Douglas Fisher and Dr. Frey's implementation of the culture of achievement has taken place at Health Science High and Middle College in San Diego, CA, where they serve as faculty. In my personal conversations with Dr. Fisher and Dr. Frey over the past year, there is interest in further development of an elementary model. Per Dr. Fisher "there is less information available for elementary principals about creating the culture of achievement;" integrating academic press and school culture (personal communication, January 16, 2017). Understanding the knowledge, skills, behaviors, and actions that elementary principals employ in leading this transformational change and building school culture is essential.

Research was needed to understand how elementary school principals lead transformational change and build school culture (Fisher et al., 2012). Specifically, research was necessary to understand the associated skills, knowledge, and behaviors that elementary school

principals employ to lead transformational change and build school culture. Research was also necessary to understand the organizing practices or overarching ideas that elementary principals who are leading transformational change and building school culture use to describe the daily life of the school, relationships, and individuals. Finally, research was needed to understand how elementary school principals apply the relational and collegial theories of leadership-- transformational, instructional, and servant.

### **Organization**

The literature review contains the following components: conceptual framework, review of research literature and methodological literature, review of methodological issues, synthesis of research findings, and critique of previous research.

#### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework section of the literature review surfaces the relational and collegial theories of leadership, specifically servant leadership, transformational leadership, and instructional leadership. The conceptual framework also addresses how change and school culture can serve as a lens in this study on how elementary school principals lead transformational change and build school culture.

#### **Review of Research Literature and Methodological Literature**

This section of Chapter 2 includes a review of the research literature, which adds knowledge presented in studies around the role of the principal, school culture, and theories of leadership. Methodological literature reviewed and included in this section highlights extensive meta-analysis studies of effective school leadership. Methodological literature highlighted shared leadership, a systems approach, and the importance of relationships and community building. Relational and collegial theories of leadership were reviewed in the methodological

literature, looking more specifically at transformational, instructional, and servant leadership theories.

Methodologies reviewed included quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods studies. The issues inherent in these methodologies, as well as the world views and varied approaches to the research are included.

### **Synthesis of Research Findings**

The synthesis of research findings in this chapter point out that in elementary schools across the nation, principals serve a pivotal role in bringing about transformational change and building school culture (Fisher et al., 2016; Hattie, 2015; Marzano et al., 2005). Research needs to sort out the relational and collegial theories of leadership--transformational, instructional, and servant leadership--looking to systems approaches and organizational learning to understand how an educational leader, specifically an elementary school principal, leads an organization to support change and growth in students and adults in the school.

### **Critique of Previous Research**

My critique of research in Chapter 2 surfaces questions regarding the importance of published and peer-reviewed studies. Publications that refer strictly to one of three relational and collegial theories and approaches to leadership--instructional, servant, and transformational--appear to conflict with one another. Each theory appears to be the best choice for school leaders to adopt. My critique of the research in this Chapter 2 leads me to question whether educational leaders must choose one theory over another or whether there is an integrated approach that combines theories and practices.

### **Conceptual Framework**



The blog post, *Leadership Expert* (2015), attributed this quote on leadership to John Quincy Adams: “If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.” Leadership serves as the center of the conceptual framework in this study. The conceptual framework scaffolds the research and provides structure in the design (Merriam, 2009). This conceptual framework serves as a means of organizing the research and the inherent themes and concepts that serve as a lens into understanding how elementary principals lead transformational change and build school culture. The conceptual framework describes the relational and collegial theories of leadership, specifically servant leadership, transformational leadership, and instructional leadership. The conceptual framework also addresses transformational change and school culture. Fullan (2001) stated that when he looked at leadership and a culture of change there was a “convergence of theories, knowledge bases, and ideas (p. xiii). Wheatley (2002) highlighted that conditions for leading change require leaders to create and cultivate conditions through dialogue and interaction. Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers (1999) observed gaps in organizational endeavors, stating that “individuals in organizations are key” (p. 3). Brackner (2015) engaged in case study research in the Council Bluffs Consolidated School District, which pointed out that leaders must prioritize building capacity and attending to the culture.

As I began to explore how elementary school principals led transformational change and built school culture, I was confronted with the varied theories and styles of leadership. The literature review addresses the varied theories around management theory and around relational and collegial practices and theories of leadership. What is known regarding managerial and hierarchical theories of leadership, is that these approaches do not produce long term results and sustainability (Kahane, 2010; Lassiter, 2012; Sinek, 2014). According to synthesis research and

a review of pertinent literature, Crippen (2004) found that old paradigms or constructs of the 19th and early 20th century looked to power and hierarchy, basing their contextual perspectives on beliefs that leaders were born, not made, that good management was key, and failure must be avoided at all costs. In their case study data on leadership and school culture, Peterson and Deal (2002) found that “without strong positive cultures, schools flounder and die” (p. 7). They further explained:

It does not work to tighten up structures and increase accountability, beef up standards, test student performance and provide rewards to schools who measure up and sanctions to those that fall short...the heart and spirit must be infused into our relationships, for without ... schools become learning factories devoid of soul and passion. (p. 7)

Extreme approaches and quick fixes fail, as does an overuse of power (Bennis & Goldsmith, 1997; Kahane, 2010). Carrot and stick approaches, with rewards and punishments fail as well (Lassiter, 2012). “Reliance on punishment as a social regulator is problematic because it shames and stigmatizes wrong doers, pushes them into a negative societal subculture, and fails to change their behavior” (Wachtel, 2013a, p. 3). Organizational growth cannot be sustained through good management alone (Sinek, 2014). Fullan (2011) pointed out that punishments and rewards do not work and that educational leaders must learn to do what matters most and makes the biggest difference. They must act with purpose (Fullan, 2011).

Blankenstein (2013) extrapolated data from principals of highly effective schools in his study, finding that relationships and trust are key in a school culture. He also found that a common mission, vision, shared values, and goals are important as well. In addition, he found that positive relationships, collaboration, and continuous improvement contributed to success of schools. In their narrative case study, Beudoin and Taylor (2004) identified the importance of

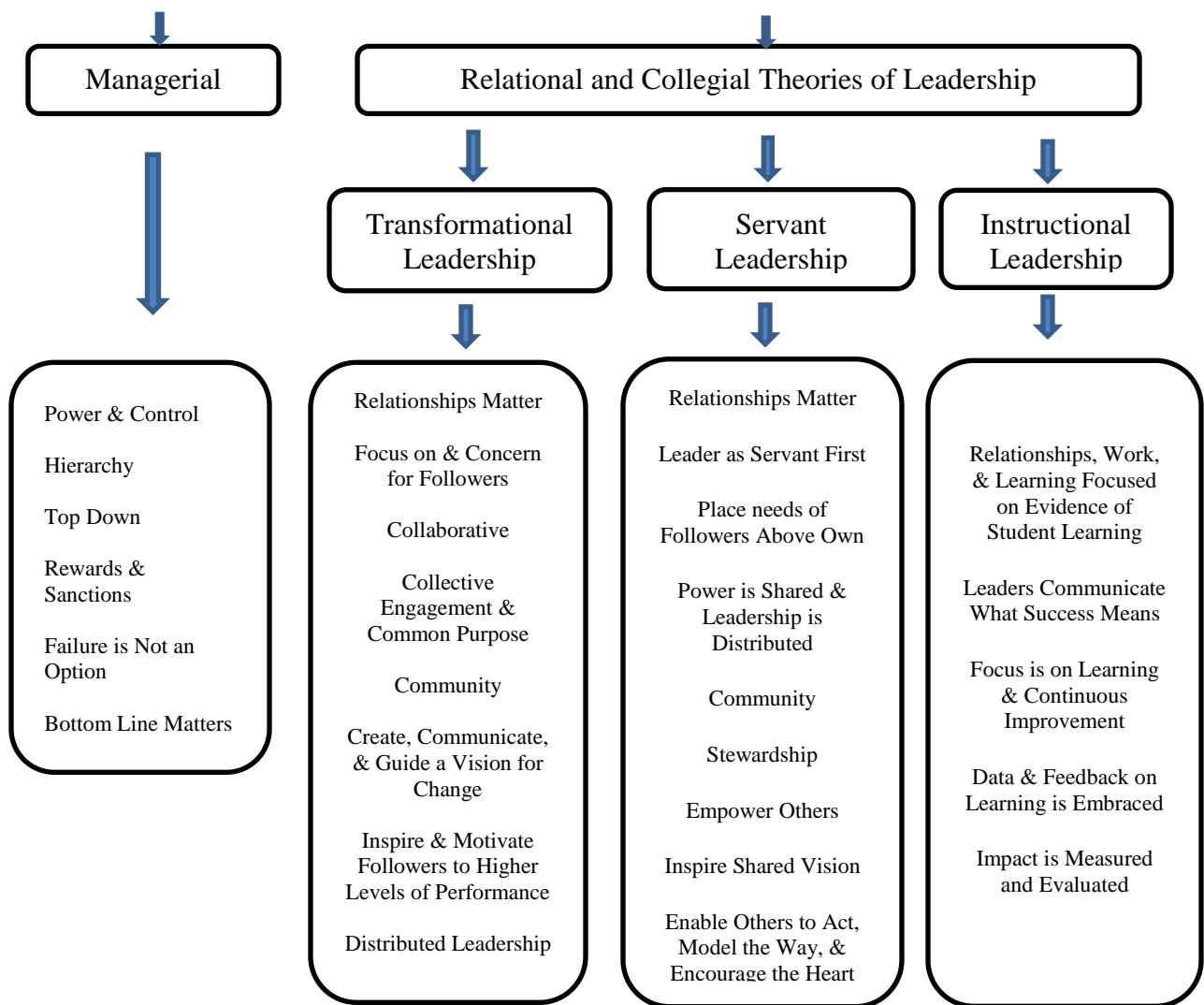
climate and support, pointing out that school leaders must integrate opportunities for connection and collaboration.

### **Relational and Collegial Theories of Leadership**

Relational and collegial theories of leadership emphasize community, collaboration, and a systems approach to schools and organizations and serve as a theme in the conceptual framework of the study. Leadership does not “reside inside of a person, but in the spaces among individuals” (Donaldson, 2007, p. 26). Schools are systems of relationships. Some aspects of the system are visible, but much is not. In a systems approach, there is a focus on seeking wholeness, of bringing elements together, of surfacing patterns and looking more collectively at an organization (Brackner & Mansback, 2015; Fisher et al., 2012; Kershner & McQuillan, 2016; Senge, 2006). These theories will be explored separately in the review of research literature.

Transformational, instructional, and servant leadership are three relational and collegial theories of leadership that can be used to approach the study of understanding how elementary school principals lead transformational change and build school culture. Figure 1 summarizes information from several sources regarding a theoretical view of leadership, including both the managerial theory of leadership and the three relational and collegial theories of leadership; servant, instructional, and transformational. Figure 1 is also found in Appendix F.

## **Theoretical Views of Leadership**



*Figure 1.* Theoretical views of leadership. This figure illustrates the theoretical views of leadership, comparing management versus the collegial and relational theories of transformational, servant, and instructional leadership summarized from the literature (Crippen (2004, 2005); Fisher et al. (2016); Greenleaf (1970); Hattie (2015); Kershner et al. (2016); Marzano et al. (2005); Taylor et al. (2007); Williams et al. (2009).

Leadership theories “offer conceptual frameworks that may prove beneficial in managing and leading our educational environments during these changing times” (Williams & Jones,

2009, pp. 33-34). The literature reviewed on leadership theories included a vast number of sources on theories in general, on managerial leadership, and on relational and collegial theories. The literature reviewed involved studies and sources targeting the individual theories of servant, transformational, and instructional leadership. Authors compared and contrasted theories of leadership. According to the literature reviewed, relational and collegial theories of leadership--instructional, transformational, and servant leadership theories--all have the potential to support change and growth in schools (Makolandra et al., 2009). According to Makolandra et al. (2009), if educational leaders are to make headway in understanding and meeting the challenges faced, it is necessary to look deeper into theories of instructional, transformational, and servant leadership. Though published research is available, and books are written describing effective schools and best practices, how an educational leader leads an organization to support change and growth is less clear, and more research is necessary (Taylor et al., 2007). Proponents of the varied theories make claims that appear to conflict with one another. This makes one wonder whether it must be one theory over another. An integrated approach that combines the theories to best support leadership and growth may be the answer. My research sought to understand how elementary school principals lead transformational change and build school culture in their respective schools, looking to the relational and collegial theories of transformational, instructional, and servant leadership.

### **Review of Research Literature**

This review of the research literature around how elementary school principals lead transformational change and build school culture, centers on the relational and collegial theories of transformational, instructional, and servant leadership. The review of research literature surfaced empirical, theoretical, and systemic reviews. A bulk of the research and methodological

reviews yield more empirical synthesis of prior research completed. In addition, theoretical reviews offer varied perspectives necessary for understanding. Quantitative studies shared in this review, such as the work of Hattie (2009, 2012, 2014), Fisher et al., (2016), Marzano et al., (2005), and the Wallace Foundation (2013), yielded systemic syntheses of experimental research findings.

Theories and themes in the literature review compelled a deeper look at the lived experience of elementary school principals in order to understand how they lead transformational change and build school culture. These themes and theories included theories of relational and collegial leadership--transformational, instructional, and servant leadership. The literature also revealed generalities around the role of a principal. Other themes included community, culture, achievement, and systems approaches. Recent research around these themes and theories of leadership was found in meta-analysis studies, identifying effect-sizes and other empirical and theoretical research reviews.

### **Role of the Principal**

In elementary schools across the nation, the principal is not only necessary, but is pivotal in bringing about transformational change and building school culture (Fisher et al., 2016; Hattie, 2015; Kershner & McQuillan, 2016; Marzano et al., 2005; Wallace Foundation, 2016). In their qualitative case study research of two urban high schools, Kershner and McQuillan (2016) pointed to the importance of systems, relationships, and interactions. “School leaders may represent the single most compelling leverage point” in school improvement (Kershner & McQuillan, 2016, p. 4). Principals are “in the best position to ensure that excellence in teaching and learning...[is] spread throughout the entire school” (Wallace Foundation, 2016, p. 10). In a study by The Wallace Foundation (2013) it was stated that principals shape the vision of

academic success for all students. Garza, Drysdale, Gurr, Jacobson, and Merchant (2014) conducted case study research involving four schools which utilized interviews and document review. They found that principals must be skilled in sustaining improvement and clearly articulating a vision in order to be successful. Baylor (2012) used purposive sampling and semi-structured interviews in their study on principal leadership. They found that principals are an important influence and must avoid power for personal gain, put the needs of others before their own, model high moral standards, set school goals, and inspire and motivate staff. Leithwood and Montgomery (2016) pointed to the result of their study on principal leadership, which identified the importance of principal knowledge and effective and ineffective behaviors. They stated that past studies have looked at the critical role principals serve, but these studies have limited insight regarding how principals go about improvement. Honig, Klasick, and Loeb (2009) stated that it is important to know what principals do and how they spend their time as they engage in the complex tasks of their role. It is necessary to better understand the work lives of principals. The weight of these statements makes it crucial to uncover just how a principal can achieve this level of growth and change.

To begin to understand the complexity of leadership, it is necessary to explore the role of the elementary principals, looking deeply at the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors. Literature surrounding school and organizational culture, system approaches, transformational leadership and change, distributed or shared leadership, and servant leadership must be fully explored.

## **Culture of Achievement**

Fisher et al., (2012) engaged in action research following the action research processes of Stinker's (2007), "look, think, act, and look again." Based upon their findings, they emphasized that it is not enough for schools to focus solely on test scores and achievement data, and that there must be a more systemic focus that looks to culture and the complexity that makes up a school community. A school culture supports learning and guides decision making, telling an organization how individuals and groups interact and relate with one another. When an organization clearly defines and describes their practices, a culture emerges to support learning and growth (Fisher et al., 2012). Fisher et al. used the term pillars to describe the organizational practices that operationalize the mission of an organization. The five pillars associated with a culture of achievement include: welcoming, do no harm, choice words, it's never too late to learn, and best school in the universe (Fisher et al., 2012).

Case study research in Round Rock, Texas by Brenna (2015) found that middle school principals must create a climate for improved teaching and learning. Knapp, Honig, Plecki, Portin, and Copland (2014) found that quality teaching and learning are at the heart of school improvement and must be a priority. These two studies support the research of Fisher et al. (2012) in focusing on both school culture and academic press in building a culture of achievement.

The scope of this literature review and research looks at how elementary school principals lead this dynamic level of transformational change and build school culture, providing leadership and learning around the associated pillars. According to Fisher et al., (2012), "the collective power of a school community that turns its attention to building a culture of achievement cannot be underestimated" (p. 3).

### **Meta-Analysis of Effective School Leadership**



Meta-analysis studies involve a statistical approach that works to resolve uncertainties and derive conclusions about a large body of research (Thomas & Harden, 2008). Koricheva and Gurevitch (2013) shared that meta-analysis research integrates findings in a large collection of research and is a powerful tool to assess statistical significance and magnitudes of effect size. Meta-analysis is not a predictive tool, but one of explanation and interpretation (Thomas & Harden, 2008). In 2005, Marzano, Waters, and McNulty used meta-analysis, finding that there is a positive link between school leadership and student achievement. Through this lens they looked at theories of leadership and identified important responsibilities and practices tying school leadership to student achievement. Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) also used a meta-analysis approach comparing transformational and instructional leadership. They questioned much of Marzano's findings, saying that of the 70 studies in Marzano's meta-analysis, 60 of them were not published or peer-reviewed studies. Robinson et al. (2008) found that instructional leadership had three to four times more impact than transformational leadership in schools. They did not support the findings that goal setting, planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and curriculum yielded substantial impact, finding only moderate effects. Effect size was used in the studies by Hattie (2015) and further applied by Fisher et al. (2015). In these studies, effect size was used to describe the level of impact a specific practice or component has on learning. Researchers frequently use the term statistically significant when reporting data analysis results. Researchers make claims of significance when, chance is reduced to 5% (as in  $p < 0.05$ ) or 1% (as in  $p < 0.01$ ) meaning the effect found in the study was unlikely to be zero: something happened (but there's no hint of the size of the effect, or whether it was worthwhile). (Fisher et al., 2015, p. 5)

A meta-analysis of transformational and instructional leadership pointed to the stronger impact of instructional leadership (Hattie, 2015). In the instructional theory of leadership, school climate is created around learning, which welcomes critique and utilizes only interventions that achieve high levels of impact (Hattie, 2015, p. 37). According to Hattie, the following effect-sizes of behaviors result in high impact and are connected to effective leadership: evaluating impact as a leader (.91), getting colleagues and teachers to focus on evaluating their impact (.91), focusing on high-impact teaching and learning (.84), explicit focus on what success looks like (.71), and embracing challenge and eliminating *just do your best* (.57). Data and evidence of impact must be embraced according to Hattie (2015), with focus on learning not teaching. According to Copland and Knapp (2006) and their review of research and synthesis, leaders must support teaching and learning.

A deep understanding of leadership and the varied theories of leadership are necessary. Research is critical to understand how elementary school principals lead transformational change and build school culture. Research must identify the knowledge, skills, and behaviors that elementary principals employ to lead this transformational change and build school culture. Hargreaves and Boyle (2015) shared that for leaders there must be consistency in what you lead, why you lead, and how you lead. Leaders must support collaboration, stimulate and support teams, look to data and collaborative judgment, and ensure long-term sustainable success. Principals must "model a love of learning...carry out actions that make a positive learning environment, [have] high expectations for all students to learn... [and communicate that] student learning [is] the most important thing going on in the school" (Gedifew, 2014, p. 546). According to a mixed-method study involving questioning and interviews by Gedifew (2014), principals must demonstrate "compassion, empathy, and being able to support teachers

personally and professionally" (p. 546). Gedifew's study sought to understand perceptions of principals. Principals play a significant role in developing a culture and environment that ensures learning.

### **Systems Approaches in Learning Organizations**

Much is written about systems approaches to schools and organizations (Brackner & Mansback, 2015; Fisher et al., 2012; Kershner & McQuillan, 2016; Senge, 2006; Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, Dutton, & Kleine, 2000; Senge, Ross, Smith, Roberts, & Kleiner, 1994; Wachtel, 2017). A systemic approach is necessary for a learning organization to grow and improve, which applies to school culture. Leadership can transform a learning organization, facilitate learning, and develop a deep sense of community and interconnected thinking, which fosters commitment to the organization and its goals. A systems approach answers the deeply held questions of its members, such as 'what is our purpose? What are we about? What are we trying to achieve?' Fragments or pieces of an organization cannot be viewed separately and then put together to see the whole. People cannot "see the big picture as we try to reassemble the fragments...the task is futile-similar to trying to reassemble the fragments of a broken mirror to see a true reflection...thus after a while we give up trying to see the whole altogether" (Senge, 2006, p. 1). "Growing as human beings starts with a commitment to something that truly matters" (Senge, 2006, p. 264).

In a systems approach, teams must look to aspiration, personal mastery, and shared mission. Teams must engage in reflective conversation, understand mental models, and realize the importance of dialogue. There must be attention on systems thinking and understanding complexity. Systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision, and team learning are key for learning organizations (Senge, 2006). There needs to be caution as

problems in an organization are approached, because "today's problems come from yesterday's solutions" (Senge, 2006, p. 53). Often in an attempt at quick solutions, people shift the problem or burden elsewhere. Some foundations for a learning organization include: change through conversation, reflective openness, growing people, purpose worthy commitment, and transformative relativeness. Learning starts with the leader and takes place over time. "A culture that integrates action and reflection arrives at better decisions" (Senge, 2006, p. 289). According to systems theory, for schools to learn, there must be an awareness of mental models. "Our behaviors and attitudes are shaped by the images, assumptions, and stories that we carry in our minds of ourselves, other people, institutions, and every aspect of the world" (Senge et al., 2000, p. 67). Individuals must surface assumptions and attitudes to learn and grow. A ladder of inference is often used by Senge (2006) as a means of explaining how advocacy and inquiry in thinking engages with mental models and how assumptions play into the process. In the ladder of inference there is observable data, which is selected by an individual, meaning is added, assumptions are made, conclusions are drawn, beliefs are adopted, and actions are taken (Senge, 2006). This happens in a split second and contributes to differences in perceptions. It explains how people can all look at or experience the same thing and perceive it differently.

Differences in perception matter as people talk about systems and relationships since these differences in perceptions can put people at odds. Change happens in systems and is difficult without looking below the surface. Individuals cannot limit the focus to what is visible or to events. Educators must look to patterns and trends, structures and systems, and mental models. An iceberg is used to model this view and guide systems thinking (Senge, 2006).

## **Relationships and Building Community**

Relationships are a part of a community who learns and works together. A key part in embracing a learning community involves interaction and presence with one another. Block (2008) shared that belonging is essential in communities and schools. The quality of relationships creates cohesion in communities (Block, 2008, p. 5). Block added that belonging involves intentionality on being welcoming with one another. In South Africa there is a greeting "sawu bona" which means "I see you." Before one engages with another, they must be seen. Likewise, in South Africa they also engage in the "spirit of unbuntu"-where there is the belief that a person is a person because of other people (Senge et al., 1994, p. 3). Relationships are key in communities and cultures. Kahane (2004) shared that by talking and listening people create new realities and transform communities; how people talk, think, and act together (p.1).

A systemic approach to community is necessary. Leaders must attend to school culture and community partnerships. Leaders must build internal capacity to do the work necessary in creating strong cultures in schools (Brackner & Mansback, 2015). System elements must generate new relationships and interconnections. Schools are systems of relationships. Adaptive change must be understood. Complexities, tensions, characteristics, and related implications for school leadership must be comprehended and factored in (Kershner & McQuillan, 2016). In a study involving qualitative interviews and protocols to identify themes in their research on school leadership, Oliver and Huffman (2016) found that shared values and vision, along with collaboration, yields a stronger school community.

Building community takes place through mutual exchange and interaction. People create emotional bonds that tie individuals in an organization together. The field of social science, the framework for restorative practices through the International Institute for Restorative Practices

(IIRP) offers processes and tools to strengthen relationships and community. Research through the IIRP found that restorative practices work builds “social capital and achieves social discipline through participatory learning and decision making” (Wachtel, 2013b, p. 1). Social capital is that great connector in an organization, that enables “trust, mutual understanding, shared values, and behaviors, that bind us together and make cooperative action possible...[this] network of relationships ...creates a healthy and positive organizational environment” (Wachtel, 2013b, p. 1). Restorative practices serve to strengthen relationships and community used by school leaders, building a positive school culture.

### **Relational and Collegial Theories of Leadership**

Relational and collegial theories of leadership emphasize community, collaboration, and a systems approach to schools and organizations. Leadership does not “reside inside of a person, but in the spaces among individuals” (Donaldson, 2007, p. 26). Schools are systems of relationships. According to Jaworski (1998) leadership is not something you do, it is an expression of who you are. Three relational and collegial theories of leadership that can be used to approach the study of how elementary school principals lead transformational change and build school culture include servant, transformational, and instructional leadership.

**Servant leadership.** Servant leadership, as coined by Robert K. Greenleaf in his personal work and study in 1970 in his publication, *The Servant as Leader*, specified that a servant leader “is a servant first” (p. 6). This conscious choice to serve first orients the leader to service, with aspirations to lead. There is a stark difference in those who are a leader first and those that are a servant first (Greenleaf, 1970). Servant leadership,

begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is

leader first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions...The leader-first and the servant-first are two extreme types.

Between them there are shadings and blends that are part of the infinite variety of human nature. (Greenleaf, 1970, p. 6)

Servant leaders are relational, share power, and care deeply about people in the organization, placing the needs of others above their own (Greenleaf, 1970; Greenleaf, 1977; Sendjaua & Sarros, 2002; Sinek, 2014). For servant leaders, “the real power comes from positively influencing the people around them” (Servant Leadership Institute, n.d. para. 4). Servant leaders guide and encourage individuals in the organization (Selladurai & Carraher, 2014). Servant leaders must embrace stewardship and service (Block, 1996; Crippen, 2004; Sergiovanni, 1994). Ten characteristics associated with servant leadership include: listening, empathy/other oriented perspective and acceptance, healing, awareness-general and self, persuasion, conceptualization/nurturing the dream, foresight/intuition and mindfulness, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community (Crippen, 2004; Crippen, 2005; Johnson, 2001; Williams & Jones, 2009). These characteristics are narrowed into five broad domains of leadership: inspire shared vision, enable others to act, model the way, challenge process and encourage the heart (Kouzes & Posner, 1997). The best test for servant leadership is seen in the answer to the question, “do those served grow?” (Williams & Jones, 2009, p. 32). A servant leader is a true humanitarian, puts others before his or herself, is caring and compassionate, balanced, empowers others, is servant first/leader second, and is transformational (Crippen, 2004, p. 15). Servant leadership requires that autocratic, authoritarian, and hierarchical leadership be dissolved (Salladurai & Carraher, 2014). Salladurai and Carraher (2014) also shared that the traditional leader subordinate relationship charts must be turned upside down.

Servant leadership embraces behaviors and practices that turn the traditional leadership power model upside down, where instead of the people working to serve the leader, the leader exists to serve the people. This requires a shift in mindset.

Bin Don (2014) conducted research on servant leadership that included a cross-section survey of 342 secondary teachers, using the Servant Leadership Scale (SLC) and the Change Facilitators Style Questionnaire (CFSQ). Bin Don found that servant leadership contributes positively to change management in schools, reporting that servant leadership should be applied and practiced by school leaders. DuFour (2001) found that servant leadership supports growth and improvement in organizations. Block (1996) pointed out that stewardship, which is important in servant leadership, happens when there is accountability without control and compliance and desire without pressure and demand. Systems are ever changing in schools and therefore leaders must employ a variety of leadership strategies. Servant leadership is a transformational, democratic form of leadership. "Leadership without service is less substantial, more ego-driven and selfish...[versus] community centered, altruistic and empathetic" (Crippen, 2005, p. 47).

Taylor, Martin, Hutchinson, and Jinks (2007) shared that servant leadership is sometimes viewed as an extension of transformational leadership and some believe that servant leadership enhances transformational leadership and other models of leadership. Taylor et al. indicated that there is little research and an underrepresentation in texts in this regard. Lee and Zelmke (1993) put forth that practitioners question whether servant leadership is tenable in the current culture that focuses on accountability, short term results, and competition. Berry and Cartrite (2000) questioned whether servant leadership is too idealistic to address the challenges faced in



educational environments today. Neuschal (2005), in their review of literature and synthesis, wondered if embracing servant leadership was an unrealistic expectation for school leaders.

**Transformational leadership and learning.** Transformational leaders identify needs for change; they create a vision and work to inspire followers, leading to growth (Williams & Jones, 2009, p. 32). Baylor (2012) presented research indicating that to understand transformational leadership, one must understand transformational learning. Transformational learning takes place in relationships with others. It requires a deep presence and ability to listen. The domains of instrumental and communicative learning in transformative education and adult learning and how adults can form their own interpretations and think autonomously, pointing out that adults need to understand their own feelings and beliefs and cannot look to others for determining their own understanding. The adult frame of reference is formed through development of personal points of view and habits of mind. Adults engage in transformation of their frames of mind through a process of reflection. Instrumental learning is one of the domains in transformative learning. The thinking of Habermas is brought forth to address instrumental learning in terms of the “dynamics of learning to control and manipulate the environment” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 73). Instrumental learning “always involves predictions about observable events, physical or social, which can prove correct or incorrect” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 73). A central part of instrumental learning involves cause and effect and problem solving. It also involves the assessment of options and alternatives. Instrumental learning involves prediction and observation as a means of validating and justifying (Mezirow, 1991, pp. 73-74). Communicative learning is more practical, where the intent is to understand what others mean in their communication and for people to make themselves understood (Mezirow, 1991, p. 74). Social norms set this domain apart from the instrumental domain (Mezirow, 1991, p. 75). While

informative learning results in changes about what people know, transformative learning results in changes in how people know. The transformative domain of communicative learning requires rational discourse. Individuals engaged in this discourse must be able to communicate clearly with one another. They must not attempt to coerce the other person and must be able to look at evidence and arguments. They must be open to the perspective of the other person and able to come to consensus through dialogue (Mezirow, 1991). “Growing as human beings starts with a commitment to something that truly matters” (Senge, 2006, p. 264). Scharmer and Kaufer (2013) pointed out that “energy follows attention” and people must therefore be present, opening their mind, heart and will, observing, and reflecting (p. 21).

Transformational leadership is a theory that follows the lines of transformational learning, involving the leader engaging with followers, building positive and trusting relationships. Transformational leaders focus on the teachers, setting the vision and clear goals for them and inspiring growth (Giancola & Hutchinson, 2008; Hattie, 2015; Kershner & McQuillan, 2016; Nedelcu, 2013). “Transformational leadership focuses on developing the organization’s capacity to innovate” (Nedelcu, 2013, p. 238). There must be attention to the purpose of improvement of instruction in order to support changes in practice. For achievement and learning to be impacted, leaders must create a shared sense of purpose, focus on developing a climate of high expectations, and a school culture focused on improving teaching and learning (Nedelcu, 2013).

Schools are systems of relationships. Adaptive change must be understood. Complexities, tensions, characteristics, and related implications for school leadership must be understood and factored in. Transformational leaders are concerned with “getting followers to engage in and support organizational objectives” (Williams & Jones, 2009, p. 33).

**Instructional leadership.** Instructional leadership prioritizes teaching and learning. Instructional leaders prioritize their attention, time, and focus on learning. A meta-analysis of transformational and instructional leadership pointed to the stronger impact of instructional leadership (Hattie, 2015). "High-impact instructional leadership is riskier than transformational leadership, because leaders have to publicly declare what success means-and they may not get there, at least not quickly" (Hattie, 2015, p. 36). "The high impact leader creates a school climate in which everybody learns, learning is shared, and critique isn't just tolerated, it is welcomed...There's mutual agreement that any interventions that do not achieve the intended impact will be changed or dropped" (Hattie, 2015, p. 37).

### **Review of Methodological Literature**

Methodologies that are found in the literature include primarily quantitative research, though some mixed methods and qualitative research is present. Researchers have used achievement data analysis, surveys, open-ended questioning, interviews, narrative approaches, case studies, phenomenological methods, and meta-analysis. Meta-analysis studies were used to integrate large bodies of research. Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) used meta-analysis, finding that there is a positive link between school leadership and student achievement. They looked at theories of leadership and identified important responsibilities and practices tying school leadership to student achievement. Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) also used a meta-analysis approach comparing transformational and instructional leadership. They questioned much of Marzano's findings, citing concern over the types of studies included. In their own study, Robinson et al. (2008) found that instructional leadership had three to four times more impact than transformational leadership in schools. They did not support the findings that goal setting, planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and curriculum yielded substantial

impact, finding only moderate effects. Effect size is also used in the studies by Hattie (2015) and Fisher et al. (2015).

Current research seems to be working to answer questions around whether collaboration is a viable approach to change, how culture plays into school improvement, the knowledge, skills, and practices leaders need to employ to lead change, and questions more specific to the varied theories of leadership.

### **Quantitative, Qualitative and Mixed-Methods Approaches**

Studies that were included in the preceding literature review that employed a quantitative approach, worked to test established hypotheses and objectives and examine variables and their relationships. Their approach was one of deduction, looking to data on school improvement and effective schools research. The mixed-methods research included in the preceding literature review had both quantitative and qualitative aspects, using both interviews and a review of data or use of surveys. In mixed-method approaches, the researcher used “both approaches in tandem so that the overall strength of a study is greater than either qualitative or quantitative research” (Creswell, 2013, p. 4). Qualitative researchers took the approach of “exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2013, p. 4). Research design is such that the methodology, assumptions, philosophy, strategies of inquiry, and methods all intersect (Creswell, 2013, p. 5).

### **Worldview Assumptions**

Research studies follow worldview assumptions and employ methods of data collection and strategies for inquiry consistent with their worldview (Creswell, 2013). Researchers frequently follow a personal interest, which ignites their own passions and interests, which is clearly the case in most the current studies reviewed (Machi & McEvoy, 2012). Some of the

research included in the preceding review is of a qualitative methodology, which employs a more inductive data analysis, in some of the qualitative studies in this review, there appears to be deductive testing of theories taking place. The role of an educational leader is complex; research design must consider a social constructivist philosophy to understand the complexity and an inductive approach to explore and understand the complexity and meaning.

### **Qualitative Phenomenological Approach**

To best understand how elementary school principals lead transformational change and build school culture, a qualitative approach or strategy of inquiry was most appropriate. Qualitative research involves in-depth investigation in the context of real life (Yin, 2009). Using a constructivism world view or belief, this research sought understanding and meaning of the complexity surrounding the experiences of the elementary principals involved in the research. Surfacing elementary principals' views with broad, open-ended questions was necessary as was context (Creswell, 2013, p. 8). Following a phenomenological approach to the qualitative research allowed me to bring out the "essence of human experience about the phenomenon" (Creswell, 2014, p. 13). This approach supported extensive and prolonged engagement with a smaller group of subjects. Methods such as open-ended questions in interviews and questionnaires, observations, and a review of artifacts supported this extensive approach to the research.

### **Ethical Issues**

No review of methodological research is complete without a look to the ethical issues inherent in research. Though a qualitative approach involves more interpretation and calls for the researcher to position his or herself in the study, there are clear measures that ensure an ethical approach is adhered to. Research is a social activity that involves the "forging of bonds

that create community and the moral choices we face when we act in that community” (Booth, Colomb, & Williams, 2008, p. 273). Relationships and community are at the heart of this research and with it comes responsibilities for protection and communication. A researcher must go beyond the obvious “thou shalt nots” as Booth et al., (2008) called them. When a researcher works in or with a community as happens in this qualitative approach, the researcher and those in the study, as well as readers of the completed research, “set a standard of work higher than ...you could set for yourself alone” (Booth et al., 2008, p. 275). This shared understanding and relationship supports an ethical approach to the research. Ethical researchers must “examine not only... [their] own understanding and interest, but...[their] responsibility” to the community (Booth et al., 2008, p. 275). “When [you] acknowledge your reader’s alternative views, you move closer not just to more reliable knowledge, better understanding, and sounder beliefs, but to honoring the dignity and human needs of your readers” (Booth et al., 2008, p. 275).

In this study I used qualitative research methodology, embracing a social constructivism worldview and a phenomenological approach. This research design led me to understand how elementary school principals lead transformational change and build school culture, looking to the relational and collegial theories of transformational, instructional, and servant leadership.

### **Synthesis of Research Findings**

Researchers, whether employing qualitative, quantitative, or mixed research methods have concluded that school principals serve a pivotal role in bringing about transformational change and building school culture (Fisher et al., 2016; Hattie, 2015; Kershner & McQuillan, 2016; Marzano et al., 2005; Robinson et al., 2008; Wallace Foundation, 2016). Methods have included surveys, open-ended questioning, interviews, narrative approaches, case studies, phenomenological methods, and meta-analysis. Current research addresses questions around

whether collaboration is a viable approach to change, how culture plays into school improvement, what knowledge, skills, and practices leaders need to employ to lead change, and questions more specifically tied to the varied theories of leadership.

### **Critique of Previous Research**

Qualitative case study research findings pointed to the importance of systems, relationships, and interactions and explained that principals “may represent the single most compelling leverage point” in school improvement (Kershner & McQuillan, 2016, p. 4). A narrative case study research over a 10-year period conducted by the Wallace Foundation (2016), found that school principals are “in the best position to ensure that excellence in teaching and learning...[is] spread throughout the entire school” (p. 10). With principals being a critical factor in bringing about transformational change and building school culture, it was crucial to understand just how elementary principals experience this phenomenon and how they apply relational and collegial theories of leadership--transformational, servant, and instructional. As of 2016, Hattie’s (2009) meta-analysis research had growth to include over 1,200 other meta-analysis studies and over 70,000 individual studies in his database. Fisher, Frey and Hattie (2016) reviewed this meta-analysis database and found that the role of school leadership is pivotal in transformational change. Marzano et al. (2005) pointed out in their meta-analysis regarding the relationship of school leaders and student achievement that the principal is the single most influential person in a school (p. 7). They looked at theories of leadership and identified important responsibilities and practices tying school leadership to student achievement.

In a meta-analysis approach comparing transformational and instructional leadership, Robinson et al. (2008) questioned much of Marzano’s findings, questioning the selected studies

in the synthesis. In their study, Robinson et al. determined that instructional leadership had three to four times the impact of transformational leadership and did not support the findings that goal setting, planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and curriculum yielded substantial impact, finding only moderate effects. Robinson et al. reported that leaders promoting and participating in learning and development with teachers only yielded strong average effects. Critiquing this research, a reviewer would believe that transformational and servant leadership were not as effective as instructional leadership. Much of the research on leadership theories in the preceding literature review tended to discount the other theories and promote their own theory as the answer to school improvement and the building of a positive school climate.

Many of the prior studies included in the preceding review employed quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods approaches. These studies worked to test established hypotheses and objectives, and examine variables and their relationships (Creswell, 2013). They were more deductive in nature. Qualitative researchers take the approach of “exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2013, p. 4).

A study using school data in the Texas School Project through the University of Texas, found that effective leaders improved the learning climate and associated student learning in their schools and ineffective leaders had a negative effect on the learning climate and associated student learning in their schools (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2013). What these studies do not research is the understanding of the lived experience of these principals and how they lead transformational change and build school culture. These studies have focused on quantifying the role of the elementary principal and not on understanding the role.

Previous research has not attempted to understand the knowledge, skills, and behaviors that elementary principals employ to lead transformational change and build school culture.



Research was needed to understand how the relational and collegial theories of leadership--transformational, instructional, and servant leadership--and systems approaches are applied by elementary principals. Understanding how an educational leader, specifically an elementary principal, leads an organization to support change was necessary. With proponents of specific leadership theories and approaches making claims that appear to conflict with one another and allege that their approach is the obvious choice, educational leaders are left wondering whether they must choose one theory over another or whether there is an integrated approach that combines theories and practices. In this research study, I sought to understand how elementary school principals lead transformational change and build school culture, looking to the relational and collegial theories of transformational, instructional, and servant leadership, as well as key knowledge, skills, and behaviors.

### **Chapter Summary**

Theories and themes in the preceding literature review compel a deeper look at the lived experience of elementary school principals in order to understand how they lead transformational change and build school culture. Research in this chapter fell into themes and theories around relational and collegial leadership: transformational, instructional, and servant leadership. Research such as that of Fisher et al. (2016), Hattie (2015), Kershner and McQuillan (2016), Marzano et al. (2005), Robinson et al. (2008), and the Wallace Foundation (2016) described the critical role that principals play in both school culture and learning.

Much of the previous and current research literature has focused on quantifiable data and analysis. Culture and achievement has been looked at separately and quantitatively. Research was necessary to understand how elementary school principals lead transformational change and build school culture. Specifically, research was needed to understand the knowledge, skills, and

behaviors that elementary principals employ to lead transformational change and build school culture.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

To best understand how elementary school principals lead transformational change and build school culture, it was necessary for me to look through the lens of relational and collegial theories of transformational, instructional, and servant leadership. This study embraced a qualitative phenomenological approach or strategy of inquiry, with a constructivism world view or belief that sought understanding and meaning of the complexity surrounding the experiences of elementary principals. A qualitative approach is one of investigation and an in-depth look at real life contexts (Yin, 2009). “Qualitative research is interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam, 2009, p. 6). A phenomenological approach seeks to understand what individuals experience and how they experience it, describing what it has been like for individuals, and then finding what is in common, or the universal essence (Moustakas, 1994).

Prior studies included in the preceding literature review were found to employ quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods approaches. Studies that employed a quantitative approach, worked to test established hypotheses and objectives, and examined variables and their relationships (Creswell, 2013). This quantitative approach of deduction does not promote the “exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” that qualitative phenomenological research does (Creswell, 2013, p. 4).

For this study, I selected a phenomenological qualitative approach or strategy of inquiry. This research sought understanding and meaning of the complexity surrounding the experiences of elementary school principals and how they lead transformational change and build school culture, looking deeply at the relational and collegial theories of transformational, instructional, and servant leadership. Moustakas (1994) pointed out that in phenomenological research, “the

aim is to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it” (p. 13). Phenomenological research was selected since the focus was on understanding the essence and meaning of human experience around the described phenomenon. The phenomenological research involved surfacing participant views with broad, open-ended interview questions (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). Following a phenomenological approach to the qualitative research allowed me to bring out the “essence of human experience about the phenomenon” (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). This approach supported an extensive and a prolonged engagement with a smaller group of elementary school principals. Methods which included open-ended questions in interviews, observations, a review of artifacts, and field notes supported this extensive approach to the research. This chapter includes a full description of the research questions and designs, the population and sampling, the instrumentation, data collection, and analysis, as well as the validation, findings, and ethical considerations. This phenomenological qualitative approach or strategy of inquiry sought understanding and meaning of the complexity surrounding the experiences of the elementary school principals and how they lead transformational change and build school culture, looking deeply at the relational and collegial theories of transformational, instructional, and servant leadership.

Phenomenological research requires that experiences are clearly understood and focuses on description of experience, not on objects or assumptions (Polkinghorne, 1989).

Phenomenological research is the study of lived experience; a common or shared experience of a phenomenon. Bracketing ensured that I put aside bias and suspended judgment, in order to “successfully achieve contact with essences” of the experience and enabled me to see the phenomenon more clearly (Laverty, 2003, p.6). Phenomenological research uses

“inquiry...[and] methodologies that emphasize discovery, description, and meaning, rather than prediction, control, and measurement” (Laverty, 2003, p.2). In this type of research, the researcher looks deeply at experiences that may be taken for granted, which may result in new understanding of the experience.

### **Research Questions**

Research questions emerged from the study design (Merriam, 2009). According to Merriam (2009), it is the “interest in knowing more about one’s practice, and ...in improving one’s practice...leads to a researchable question” (p. 1). Research questions focused the study on the meaning in a context (Merriam, 2009). Yin (2014) noted that “defining the research question is probably the most important step to be taken in a research study” (p. 11). The research question directs the substance and the form of the research (Yin, 2014).

The following questions guided the phenomenological research into understanding how elementary school principals lead transformational change and build school culture. Efforts to understand the relational and collegial theories of transformational, instructional, and servant leadership, the role of elementary school principals, and the complexity surrounding the experiences, comprised the center of this research. Specific questions included:

- How do elementary principals who are leading transformational change and building school culture describe their experiences and the daily life of their school and their leadership?
- How do elementary principals describe the associated skills, knowledge, and behaviors that they employ to lead transformational change and build school culture?

- How are the relational and collegial theories of leadership--transformational, instructional, and servant leadership--applied by elementary principals leading transformational change and building school culture?

### **Purpose of Study**

Through a phenomenological qualitative approach or strategy of inquiry, I sought understanding and meaning of the complexity surrounding the experiences of the elementary school principals, building understanding around how they described their daily life of school, along with how they lead transformational change and build school culture. I sought to understand the associated skills, knowledge, and behaviors that elementary school principals employed and how the relational and collegial theories of transformational, instructional, and servant leadership were applied by elementary principals in leading transformational change and building school culture.

### **Research Population and Sampling Method**

Sampling is an important aspect for consideration in research, who to include and who to exclude. The nature and purpose of the research drove the sampling method. Merriam (2009) noted that clear criteria for purposive sampling is key and provides a rationale for the sampling. Purposive sampling supported this study's nature and purpose as a method that required me to "intentionally sample a group of people that can best inform the research about the research problem under examination" (Creswell, 2013, Chapter 7, para. 4). In sampling for phenomenological research, participants must have experienced the phenomenon and be able to articulate their lived experiences. According to Fowler (2013), a sample size determines levels of precision and accuracy of results. Intact groups with similar characteristics were used in the sampling (Fowler, 2013). Participants were selected from elementary schools who have

experienced the phenomenon being researched, most specifically around the culture of achievement, which was described in the Framework for Intentional Teaching (F.I.T.).

Participants were drawn from elementary schools in a school district in the Pacific Northwest. None of the schools selected were schools where I worked. I was familiar with the principals selected in the Pacific Northwest School District. Permission was obtained in writing from the superintendent of the district in the Pacific Northwest. The interviews were scheduled at a time and date preferred by the participant to be interviewed. Interviews and data collection began upon approval of the research proposal and the IRB application. The timeline for data collection and interviews was November, 2017 through January, 2018.

Participants included 10 elementary principals who had experience with the phenomenon. The guidelines for determining numbers of participants in phenomenological research vary according to researchers, with most agreeing that data saturation drives the number of participants (Creswell, 2013; Englander, 2012; Giorgi, 2009; Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994; Morse, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1994; van Manen, 1990; van Manen, 2007; Yin, 2011). Moustakas (1994) suggested several for a phenomenological sample and further shared Polkinghorne's (1994) recommendation of 5 to 25. Giorgi (2009) suggested at least 3, Morse (1994) suggested 6 to 10, Kvale (1994) recommended 5 to 20, and Englander (2012) noted 10-15. Yin (2011) contrasted samples with large numbers of participants and shorter periods of time to those with a smaller number of participants and extended time. Yin also recommended an approximate number be identified, and indicated the number is subject to change. The number is not the determining factor (Yin, 2011). Merriam (2009) said the number of participants included in the sample really depends on the questions in the interview. Merriam (2009) said, "there is no answer" (p. 80).

Given the nature of the proposed study, age and gender were not pertinent to selection. Further criteria for participating principals required that participants had all been implementing the components of F.I.T., which included the culture of achievement. Data regarding elementary principal participant experiences was obtained using a data collection form that is found in Appendix D. All participants had more than 15 years in education, had served in leadership positions for at least 11 years, served as elementary principals for 8 or more years, had served as an elementary principal at least 5 years in a single building and at least 2 years in their current building.

### **Instrumentation**

Instrumentation included interviews, observations, artifacts, and field notes, which according to Creswell (2013) are research tools that support the researcher in understanding the essence of the lived experience with the phenomenon. Moustakas (1994) noted that typically interviews are used as a method in phenomenological research and that open-ended comments and questions are used. Moustakas further suggested that researchers may want to develop a series of questions in advance, an interview guide or topical guide to yield depth if needed, but added that in the interview, “these are varied, altered, or not used at all when the co-researcher shares the full story of his or her experience of the bracketed question” (p. 114). For this reason, a researcher-made interview protocol was used. This protocol is found in Appendix C. No previously used instruments were available to address the research questions. The research questions drove the data collection and instrumentation. Fisher et al. (2012) have not conducted phenomenological research with interviews of school principals; therefore, no prepared instrument was available.



The interview protocol was piloted with of one educator who served as a school leader, had similar familiarity with the criteria of the sample population, and was not a part of the study. I fully utilized the interview protocol in the pilot, noting any improvements necessary. The pilot study alleviated any problematic issues with the interview protocol. It also supported me in determining if there were flaws in instrumentation, so that revisions could be made. In addition, the interview protocol was reviewed externally by Dr. Fisher and Dr. Frey who have researched and written extensively about the culture of achievement and implementation. Dr. Fisher and Dr. Frey suggested that question number two on the protocol be kept more open versus narrow in focus. Question number two was changed to reflect that feedback. Dr. Fisher and Dr. Frey also provided feedback on question three, confirming that the questions under the headings were being used as probes and not the actual categories, in order to keep it more open, not using the identified pillars--welcoming, do not harm, choice words, never too late to learn, and best school in the universe--in the questions. Dr. Fisher and Dr. Frey also liked the probes regarding “what’s sacred, and what their values and beliefs were.” Pilot interviews and an external interview protocol review were crucial steps to ensure that the instrumentation process and the instruments themselves align with the research questions (Merriam, 2009).

## **Data Collection**

### **Interviews**

Merriam (2009) suggested semi-structured in-person interviews with a clear interview schedule or plan be used in qualitative research. Interviews in this study took place in school district offices and conference rooms. Yin (2011) recommended selecting a venue that is convenient to the participant. Ensuring that participants felt safe and at ease was important (Moustakas, 1994). The school district offices and conference rooms were selected to add a

uniformity of location in the research. Interviews in qualitative research utilize a conversational mode, and time allotment must give the participant the time and opportunity to communicate their experiences (Yin, 2011).

Moustakas (1994) suggested the development of an interview guide or topical guide with questions developed in advance to probe deeper if needed, though these questions can be “varied, altered, or not used at all” (p. 114). The guiding questions were set to probe the textural and structural aspects of the phenomenon, asking what the interviewee had experienced and how they had experienced it or what context or situation influenced their experiences (Moustakas, 1994). As recommended by Rubin and Rubin (2012), I used three-linked questions in semi-structured interviews: main questions, probes, and follow-up. Merriam also recommended the use of semi-structured interviews for qualitative research. The Interview Protocol can be found in Appendix C. Interviews utilized open-ended questions, before going on to the deeper questions about participant experiences. There were main questions that were broad and open-ended as used in the work of phenomenologist Moustakas. Main questions also “assure that each of the separate parts of the research question are answered” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 6). Probing was used for clarification and elaboration. Probes “encourage the interviewee to keep talking on the subject, providing examples and details” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 6). Follow-up questions “ask interviewees to elaborate on key concepts, themes, ideas, or events that they have mentioned to provide the researcher with more depth” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 6). Interviews were used to gain descriptions of experiences through first-person interviews (Moustakas, 1994). In qualitative research, interviews “require intense listening, a respect for, and curiosity about, people’s experiences and perspectives, and the ability to ask about what is not yet understood” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 6.) I continued with the interviews until data saturation was reached.

Merriam recommended data saturation, where “the researcher begins to see or hear the same things over and over again and no new information surfaces” (p. 29).

Follow-up interviews were done for added clarity and understanding. All interviews were audio recorded, with permission of the participant. This consent form is found in Appendix B. Audio-recording was a tool for collecting clear interview content and statements. This allowed me and participant to engage in a more authentic dialogue around the research questions. I could then focus awareness on the context surrounding the interview and make eye contact that would not have been possible if the interview was captured through note taking alone. Audio-recordings were transcribed, and member checking took place. Member checking is a debriefing method that can help establish validity by having the individuals interviewed verify the transcript (Maxwell, 2004; Creswell, 2013).

### **Observations and artifacts**

A review of artifacts, such as handbooks, agendas for professional development, newsletters, and websites supported an extensive approach to the research and aided in understanding the lived experiences of the participant. I spent time in the schools, serving as an outside observer. Observation supported an understanding of context. Observations that are less formal acquaint the researcher with the setting. Observations and artifacts supported a well-rounded collection of data for analysis.

### **Field notes**

Field notes were collected for analysis, noting the date and time. I recorded context and other details such as setting, behaviors, nonverbals, and impressions during the interviews. Descriptions of the interview included vocal tone, impressions, reactions noted, specific words,

and notes for follow up. Rich and thick descriptions were used in the field notes. I insured that field notes were thorough and accurate.

### **Identification of Attributes**

Specific attributes defined this study and are identified as follows in this section. Much of the study centered around the styles of leadership, such as leadership characterized as managerial or relational and collegial. Managerial styles of leadership involve power, control, and hierarchical structures. Organizational growth cannot be sustained through good management alone (Sinek, 2014). Relational and collegial theories of leadership emphasize community, collaboration, and a systems approach to schools and organizations.

Attributes included the three relational and collegial theories of leadership: transformational, servant, and instructional. Attributes of this study also included the culture of achievement and the associated pillars (Fisher et al., 2012). Other attributes in this study included transformational change and a systems approach to change.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

The “organization of data begins when the primary researcher places the transcribed interviews before him or her and studies the material through methods and procedures of phenomenological analysis” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 118). Data analysis in this study required me to take the textural and structural descriptions and combine them to describe the integrated essence of the phenomenon. Horizontalizing served as the first step in the analysis, treating every relevant statement equal, then phenomenological reduction was begun, listing meaning units, cluster meanings into themes and categories, develop textural descriptions and structural descriptions, and then synthesizing the textural and structural composites (Moustakas, 1994). I remained open to every statement in the interview treating them with equal value. I next looked

to the unique qualities or invariant horizons, before clustering and thematizing the data.

Moustakas (1994) suggested two modified analysis methods: the van Kaam Method and the Stevich-Colaizzi-Keen Method.

Moustakas (1994) modified the Stevich-Colaizzi-Keen Method of analysis which was then used in this study to analyze the interview transcripts. To start, I fully described my own experiences with the phenomenon and engaged in analysis of the transcription, using the following steps:

1. Consider each statement with respect to the significance for description of the experience.
2. Record all relevant statements.
3. List each non-repetitive, non-overlapping statement. These are the invariant horizon or meaning units of the experience.
4. Relate and cluster the invariant horizons were related into themes.
5. Synthesize the invariant meaning units and themes into a description of the experience. Include verbatim examples.
6. Reflect on your own textural description. Through imaginative variation, construct a description of the structures of your experience.
7. Construct a textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of your experience. (pp. 121-122)

The above steps were followed for each of the verbatim transcripts of the interviewees/co-researchers. “From the individual textural-structural descriptions of all the co-researcher’s experiences, [I constructed] a composite textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience, integrating all individual textural-structural descriptions into a

universal description of the experience representing the group as a whole” (Moustakas, 1994, pp. 121-122).

Coding was also used to organize, and sort data obtained from observations and artifact collection. Through coding, data was labeled, compiled, and organized. With coding, the data was summarized and synthesized, which served as the basis for analysis. According to the Center for Evaluation and Research (n.d.), coding answers the question: “What is this evaluation about?” (p. 1) and serves as an “analytic thread that unites and integrates the major themes” of research (p. 1). I used words and phrases in the coding and a hybrid approach using both pre-set and open coding.

For the coding, I used an initial set of codes or pre-set codes, often referred to as priori codes. These codes were derived from the interview analysis, conceptual framework, research questions, and prior knowledge of the subject matter. I established a code book to list the codes and their meaning. Emergent codes were used as another set of codes as they “emerge from reading and analyzing the data” (Center for Evaluation and Research, n.d., p. 2). Emergent codes are those ideas, concepts, actions, relationships, meanings, etc. that come up in the data and are different than the pre-set codes” (Center for Evaluation and Research, n.d., p. 2). I refined codes as the data was coded. It was important “to make the codes fit the data, rather than trying to make your data fit the codes” (Center for Evaluation and Research, n.d., p. 3).

### **Limitations of the Research Design**

Limitations and delimitations are present in all research. The conditions of the research result in limitations in the analysis, reporting, instrumentation, sampling, and time constraints of the study. Delimitations occur in the choices made in setting up the research, in the reasoning

behind the sampling, the instrumentation and the data collection tools. Precautions were taken in the research design to overcome limitations and delimitations in the study. In this study, I used triangulation in the data, ensured prolonged engagement, and included rich and thick descriptions.

A structured approach to data collection and analysis can help with transferability of theories, since generalizability is not usually associated with qualitative research. Challenges in this require the researcher to identify assumptions and bracket personal bias. In this study, it was important to ensure that participants had the associated experiences with the phenomenon. Field issues such as access to participants and data, credibility of the researcher, and the building of trust were addressed. In addition, limitations of interviewing needed to ensure advanced organization, mechanics, and well-operating equipment for recording and transcribing the interview (Creswell, 2013). To overcome the limitations, I committed to the study, ensured extensive time was planned to engage in data collection and analysis, managed complexities, acknowledged time constraints, and showed multiple perspectives fully in the study.

### **Credibility and Dependability**

Credibility or trustworthiness was approached through transparency. Trustworthiness was tied to the involvement of the researcher and through the effectiveness in the research design. In the informed consent, permissions, and in all interactions, full disclosure of the research purpose and procedures built this trust and credibility. Trust took place in the relationship between me and the participants or co-researchers. Dependability of the data happened in conjunction with reliability. Ensuring that the data was consistent and reliable was important in the study. This happened through prolonged engagement, data saturation, member checking, triangulation, and rich and thick descriptions.

### **Prolonged Engagement**

Prolonged engagement builds credibility and dependability in qualitative research. Adequate time must be set aside to ensure understanding of the phenomenon. Prolonged engagement builds trust and rapport. In this study observations and time spent in the schools added to the time devoted to the understanding obtained through the interviews. I did not establish rigid timelines for engagement in order to ensure adequate time was allotted.

### **Data Saturation**

Data saturation builds the credibility and dependability of the research study. Data saturation is the point where “the researcher begins to see or hear the same things over and over again and no new information surfaces” (Merriam, 2009, p. 29). What constitutes data saturation in one study or interview may not suffice for another in terms of data saturation. Data saturation was reached in the interviews conducted.

### **Member Checking**

Member checking builds the credibility and dependability in the research studies. Member checking is a debriefing method that can help establish validity by having the individuals interviewed verify the transcript (Maxwell, 2004; Creswell, 2013). Participants in the study were offered a transcript of the interview to ensure accuracy and to ensure it captured the communication.

### **Triangulation**

Triangulation of the data strengthens and improves validity and reliability. By using multiple methods of data collection in the study, triangulation served as a means of understanding the phenomenon. In this study, I used interviews, recordings, observations,



artifact review, and field notes as multiple data sources. The use of these sources provided triangulation in the data.

### **Rich and Thick Description**

Rich and thick descriptions build the credibility and dependability in research studies. Rich description is associated with quality of the data description and thick is associated with the quantity of data. The data must be captured in rich description and be detailed to communicate the depth. Superficial description must be avoided for credibility and validity. Rich and thick description was used for field notes, artifact review, and observations.

### **Expected Findings**

Expected findings in the study included understanding how elementary school principals lead transformational change and build school culture. I sought to understand the skills, knowledge, and behaviors that elementary principals employed, along with the organizing practices and overarching ideas that elementary principals who are leading transformational change and building school culture used to describe the daily life of the school, relationships, and individuals. Transferability of theories in this phenomenological research can serve as a potential model for elementary school principals who desire to lead transformative change and build school culture.

### **Ethical Issues**

This researcher took efforts to minimize risks to participants, protecting their identities, and ensuring they are fully aware of the purpose of the study. For privacy purposes, I assigned each participant a pseudonym. After the transcripts of the interviews were transcribed and validation was completed through member checking, audio recordings were deleted. All documents and notes, including those with any names or identifying information are kept on a

password protected computer and backup files are kept in a locked cabinet. All documents will be destroyed after 3 years. Full disclosure, permissions, and consent were obtained prior to any data collection. In addition, ethical research was further assured through the submission to Concordia University's Instructional Review Board (IRB). Permission to conduct research followed the Pacific Northwest school district's policies and procedures. The Pacific Northwest school district required a request in writing to the superintendent via e-mail or letter.

Research was being conducted for the purpose of understanding how elementary school principals lead transformational change and build school culture. Collecting data to understand the skills, knowledge, and behaviors that elementary principals employ, along with the organizing practices and overarching ideas that elementary principals who are leading transformational change and building school culture use to describe the daily life of the school, relationships, and individuals served, to help myself improve my service to the school where I serve. I, in no way, planned to benefit from this research financially. I respected my sources, "preserving and acknowledging data that run against results, assert claims only as strong as warranted, [and] acknowledge limits of [my] certainty" (Booth, 2008, p. 276).

Reflexivity must be addressed in qualitative research when discussing ethical issues. Reflexivity involves a circular relationship, which is bidirectional. "A researcher's background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of the investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most important, and the framing and communication of the conclusion" (Malterud, 2001, p. 483). Researchers must be aware of the effect of reflexivity in the study procedures and outcomes, as well as the context.

As a researcher and an educator, it was pertinent to understand how elementary school principals lead transformational change and build school culture. It was crucial to understand the

skills, knowledge, and behaviors that are employed, along with the organizing practices and overarching that elementary principals use to inform their practice.

### **Chapter 3 Summary**

A phenomenological approach seeks to understand what individuals experience and how they experience it, describing what it has been like for individuals, and then finding what is in common, or the universal essence (Moustakas, 1994). A phenomenological qualitative approach or strategy of inquiry was selected for this study, since the focus was on understanding the essence and meaning of human experience around the described phenomenon. Following a phenomenological approach to the qualitative research allowed me to bring out the “essence of human experience about the phenomenon” (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). This approach supported an extensive and a prolonged engagement with a smaller group of elementary school principals.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to better understand how elementary school principals lead transformational change and build school culture. The study data obtained through interviews, observations, artifacts, and field notes helped me understand the skills, knowledge, and behaviors that elementary school principals employ and the organizing practices or overarching ideas that elementary principals who are leading transformational change and building school culture use to describe the daily life of the school, relationships, and individuals. I sought to understand the relational and collegial theories of leadership--transformational, instructional, and servant leadership--to understand how elementary school principals apply them in their daily work.

## **Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results**

Principals serve a pivotal role in bringing about transformational change and building school culture, with principals “represent(ing) the single most compelling leverage point” in school improvement (Kershner & McQuillan, 2016, p. 4). Given the importance of effective school leadership, one would assume that significant amounts of research outlined how elementary school principals could be most effective, but this is not the case. Per Dr. Fisher “there is less information available [in the literature] for elementary principals about creating the culture of achievement” (personal communication, January 16, 2017).

In the problem statement, I stated that research was necessary to understand how elementary principals lead transformational change and build school culture. I also stated that research was necessary to understand the associated skills, knowledge, and behaviors employed, the organizing practices or overarching ideas used to describe the daily life of the school, relationships, and individuals, and how the relational and collegial theories of leadership were applied. The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to understand the complexity surrounding the experiences of elementary school principals and how they lead transformational change and build school culture. I wanted to understand the associated skills, knowledge, and behaviors that elementary school principals employed and how the relational and collegial theories of transformational, instructional, and servant leadership were applied by elementary principals in leading transformational change and building school culture.

As pointed out by Moustakas (1994), “the aim (of phenomenological research) is to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it” (p. 13). Efforts to understand the relational and collegial theories of transformational, instructional, and servant leadership, the role of

elementary school principals, and the complexity surrounding the experiences, comprised the center of this research. Specific questions for the research included:

- How do elementary principals who are leading transformational change and building school culture describe their experiences and the daily life of their school and their leadership?
- How do elementary principals describe the associated skills, knowledge, and behaviors that they employ to lead transformational change and build school culture?
- How are the relational and collegial theories of leadership--transformational, instructional, and servant leadership--applied by elementary principals leading transformational change and building school culture?

This chapter includes a description of the sample, the data collection process, and the data analysis.

### **Description of the Sample**

Purposive sampling was used in this study. Each of the elementary principal participants had experienced the phenomenon; they attended professional development around F.I.T. and led professional development and associated change in their own buildings. This was evidenced in the interviews, as the elementary principals talked about their approach to change, their leadership, their school, and what they were striving for. In the interviews, principals told the story about their schools and how the school story evolved. Mark talked about when he came to his school, it was hurting, people had retreated, people were controlling, and that “there had been 50 suspensions that [prior] spring.” As Mark continued, he talked about the change, to where people now like working together. He built teams and his school transformed from a school identified as needing improvement by the state to a school recognized for their improvement.

All of the elementary principals interviewed had also engaged in professional development around the F.I.T. and the culture of achievement. The elementary principal participants were able to articulate their lived experiences. Pseudonyms were used in place of actual names for the participants, to protect the identity of the elementary principals in the study. Data saturation was reached during the seventh interview. Data saturation drove the number of participants (Moustakas, 1994).

Participants all had more than 15 years in education, had served in leadership positions for at least 11 years, served as elementary principals for eight or more years, had served as an elementary principal at least five years in a single building and at least two years in their current building. An Elementary Principal Experience Data Collection Form was used to collect data. This form is found in Appendix D. Table 1 depicts a summary of the elementary principal participant experiences in education. The table is included in Appendix E. The table lists each participant's years in education, their years in leadership positions, years as an elementary principal, and their years in each building where they have served. For these participants, leadership experiences included teacher leadership opportunities, Teachers on Special Assignment (TOSA), instructional or technology coaches, department heads, grade level chairs, school leadership team participation, dean of students, and assistant principal positions.

Table 1

*Summary of Elementary Principal Participant Experiences in Education*

Elementary Principal Participants										
	Scott	Mark	Lawrence	Pamela	James	Howard	Chad	Heather	Keith	Stephen
Yrs. In Education	15	30	40	36	22	27	28	25	29	18
Yrs. In Leadership	11	24	35	31	22	21	23	18	21	17
Years as an Elementary Principal	8	17	31	26	15	17	20	16	16	12
Yrs. In each Bldg.										
Bldg. 1	3	2	2	2	7	15	6	2	1	1
Bldg. 2	5	7	1	1	1	2	14	14	4	11
Bldg. 3		3	7	7	7				10	
Bldg. 4		5	10	16					2	
Bldg. 5			7							
Bldg. 6			4							
Attended FIT Training?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

*Note.* Yrs = Years and Bldg. = Building

**Data Collection**

Data collection in this study utilized interviews, observations, artifacts, and field notes, which according to Creswell (2013) are research tools that support the researcher in understanding the essence of the lived experience with the phenomenon. Ten principals were interviewed for the study. In addition, artifacts were collected from websites, school offices and the interviewees. Field notes were made during the interviews and from observations.

## **Interviews**

Interviews were used as a primary method in this phenomenological research. A researcher-made interview protocol was used. This protocol can be found in Appendix C.

Semi-structured in-person interviews were used in the study. Interviews took place in school district offices and conference rooms. Questions were established to probe the textural and structural aspects of the phenomenon. Questions asked what the interviewee had experienced and how they had experienced it or what context or situation influenced their experiences. As recommended by Rubin and Rubin (2012), three-linked questions in semi-structured interviews--main questions, probes, and follow-up--were used in the study. There were main questions that were broad and open-ended, as used in the work of phenomenologist Moustakas (1994). Main questions also “assure(d) that each of the separate parts of the research question (were) answered” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 6). Probing was used for clarification and elaboration. Follow-up questions “ask(ed) interviewees to elaborate on key concepts, themes, ideas, or events” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 6).

The interviews began with a review of the study purpose and procedures. This preliminary step reviewed risks, benefits, confidentiality, the right to withdraw, and contact information. Consent was obtained from each participant and a copy of the consent form was provided to them. The consent form is found in Appendix B. Interviews began after consent was obtained. I continued with the interview questions, probes, and follow-up until data saturation was reached in each interview and I began to “hear the same things over and over again and no new information surface(d)” (Merriam, 2009, p. 29). Data saturation was reached with the seventh interview.



All interviews were audio recorded, with permission of the participants. Two recording devices were used. Audio files were then uploaded and saved to a pass-code protected file location. Audio-recordings were transcribed by me, and member checking took place, with participants having the opportunity to review the transcripts. Only one participant provided correction on a transcription. Feedback received during the member checking was corrected on the corresponding transcripts. Audio-recordings were then deleted. Transcripts will be stored securely for three years and then destroyed.

### **Artifacts, Field Notes, and Observations**

A review of artifacts, such as handbooks, newsletters, and websites supported an extensive approach to the research and aided in understanding the lived experiences of the participants. These artifacts provided insight to supplement the other data collected. I compared artifacts with interview transcripts to analyze context, develop a deeper understanding, identify values, themes, and priorities. Handbooks and artifacts on the website at Mark's school shared a code of conduct, stating "We work together. We respect each other. We use positive communication," which followed his words in the interview when talking about approaches to behavior and discipline. Keith's school website shared "Our Why! In our school, we are passionate about meeting all learners where they are to help them realize their innate and extraordinary human potential." Keith's school website also shared the mission statement of the school, their core values related to caring, and the five pillars of welcome, do not harm, choice words, it's never too late to learn, and best school in the universe.

Field notes were collected for analysis, noting the date and time. I recorded context and other details such as setting and nonverbal behaviors, during the interviews. Descriptions of the interview included vocal tone, impressions, reactions noted, specific words, and notes for follow

up. Rich and thick descriptions were used in the field notes. Field notes were used to add context and added meaning to the interviews, tying words said to facial expressions, tone and nonverbal behaviors.

Observations included rich and thick descriptions of my experience in the school, driving up to the building, entering the building, entering the office, interactions observed, signage, and the environment. Observations of the offices were also included. By viewing what principals set out or decorated with, what they valued or deemed important could be seen, like pictures of family. When greeted warmly in the offices by staff, when signage was positive and welcoming, these observations supported the interview questions and responses to the question probes: How is a visitor or parent greeted upon arrival and how would they describe their experiences in your school? How would you describe your efforts with welcoming guests?

### **Data Analysis**

This qualitative research design utilized a phenomenological approach to data collection and included semi-structured in-person interviews, which were recorded and transcribed. The interviews utilized main questions, which were broad and open ended, along with probes and follow-up questions (Moustakas, 1994; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The research design also utilized the collection of artifacts and field notes for analysis. The research questions were used in the analysis and referred back to frequently.

**Bracketing.** To start the phenomenological reduction process and analysis, I first engaged in bracketing. Bracketing requires:

Preparation for deriving new knowledge but also as an experience in itself, a process of setting aside predilections, prejudices, predispositions, and allowing things, events, and

people to enter anew into consciousness, and to look and see them again, as if for the first time. (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85)

Bracketing further puts the “focus of the research” into brackets, while “everything else is set aside” (p. 96). I spent time reflecting, answering the questions, noticing personal thinking, beliefs, and values. I suspended suppositions and cleared my mind. I sought transparency in the process of bracketing, so that I proceeded with an open mind, was receptive, and engaged with curiosity in the interviews and the data analysis.

**Interview Transcript Analysis.** To begin data analysis, transcripts were read through completely three times. In these initial readings, I began bracketing, putting aside bias and suspending judgement to focus on the essence of the experience of the elementary principal participants in the study. Data analysis began with the fourth reading. Transcripts were read a total of at least eight times during data analysis.

Moustakas (1994) modified the Stevich-Colaizzi-Keen Method of analysis which was used in this study to analyze the interview transcripts. The first step of the method of analysis requires me to fully describe their own experiences with the phenomenon and engage in analysis of the transcription, using the following steps:

1. Consider each statement with respect to the significance for description of the experience.
2. Record all relevant statements.
3. List each non-repetitive, non-overlapping statement. These are the invariant horizon or meaning units of the experience.
4. Relate and cluster the invariant horizons were related into themes.

5. Synthesize the invariant meaning units and themes into a description of the experience. Include verbatim examples.
6. Reflect on your own textural description. Through imaginative variation, construct a description of the structures of your experience.
7. Construct a textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of your experience. (pp. 121-122)

The above steps were followed for each of the verbatim transcripts of the interviewees. Next, from the individual textural-structural descriptions of all the co-researcher's experiences, [I constructed] a composite textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience, integrating all individual textural-structural descriptions into a universal description of the experience representing the group as a whole. (Moustakas, 1994, pp. 121-122)

**Artifact and field notes analysis.** The analysis of artifacts--handbooks, newsletters, and websites, and field notes targeting context, setting, behaviors, nonverbals, and impressions during the interviews--provided added data for analysis. These were read through multiple times by me prior to analysis. Coding was used to organize and sort field notes and artifacts, identifying themes. Invariant horizons and unique qualities that stood, such as an emphasis on relationships, welcoming, ongoing learning, service, and collaboration were listed. These invariant horizons were clustered into themes. Color coding of themes found in the artifacts and field notes across co-researchers was used to highlight similarities and differences. Through coding, I labeled, compiled, and organized data. Coding provided a means of summarizing and synthesizing the data, which served as the basis for analysis. The analysis of artifacts and field

notes were also compared to the interview analysis. Themes from the interview analysis were used in coding the artifacts and field notes.

## **Results**

### **Interviews**

Table 1, which can be found in Appendix E, summarized the educational experiences of each elementary principal who participated in the interviews. In the interviews, I learned that leading transformational change and building school culture was experienced by the elementary principals participating in this study through attention to creating a community focused on students and learning. Heather talked about a community environment “where children are flourishing...create a vibrant, educationally rich environment for children to learn.” Much like what Fisher, Frey, and Pumpian (2012) found in their work, these principals found that they couldn’t just focus on test scores and achievement data. There was much more to their role than just that. Scott shared that the culture of his school “comes down to kids, that we create an environment where they love coming to school.” The principals shared that they needed to take a systemic approach prioritizing relationships, culture, and their school community to support learning and growth.

**Five pillars of organizational practices.** As shared in Chapter 2, Fisher et al. (2012) used five pillars or organizational practices to encapsulate what they termed a culture of achievement. Many of the elementary principals interviewed talked about the pillars when they described their experiences as a leader, their own learning, their approach to change, and their vision for their school. When talking about leading transformational change and building school culture, these elementary principals noted that they sought to create a welcoming environment, embraced a restorative approach to behavior and discipline, acknowledged that words and

language used had power, and built agency and identity. These principals focused on equity, inclusivity, and learning for all students. They focused on continual improvement for themselves and their schools. Even when they did not identify one of the pillars by name in the interview, the language they used described these organizational practices or pillars.

***Welcoming environment.*** The essential question, “can our school be so welcoming, so inviting, and so comfortable that every person who walks through our door believes that they are about to have an amazing experience?” was used by school leaders to focus on the school environment and community, ensuring that it was welcoming (Fisher et al., 2012, p. 17). Fisher et al. termed this pillar “welcome.” All of the elementary principals interviewed had systems in place to ensure everyone who entered the school felt welcomed. Heather shared that instead of tardy slips, her school uses slips that say “glad you are here.” In reference to new students or families, Stephen shared, “we greet them and get to know them right away.” Scott, Heather, and Pamela have signage welcoming guests and communicating to staff any guests who will be in the building. This way guests are greeted and welcomed. Chad shared that they call new families and “ask after a week or two ... how has it been going for your child?” For all of the principals, first impressions mattered. They worked hard to engage and connect with the community from the start. Stephen shared, “every human life is valuable.” According to Lawrence, “the most important thing is how we connect with one another.” Keith explained, “we want it to be a place of magic for everyone who walks through the door: joy, smiles, [and] kindness. We want them to like being here and know we love them. Relationships matter. We must nurture the growth in others.” Stephen approached relationships in his school community “from a place of caring, loving, and compassion.” It was through a focus on community and welcoming where the elementary principals described celebrations, joy, laughter, and fun. Pamela shared that on

Mondays, she and her assistant principal greet students and play music to welcome students to the week. Students enter dancing. For her, kicking off the week like this was better than celebrating that the week was over. All of the elementary principals paid attention to creating a welcoming school community where students, staff, and families wanted to be.

***Restorative approach to behavior and discipline.*** Creating a positive school culture that supports learning also must focus on behavior and discipline. Fisher et al. (2012) stated that schools must “increase the positive behavioral profile of the school in order for teachers to do what they do best: learn together” (p. 40). Fisher et al. termed this pillar “do no harm.” All of the elementary principals interviewed pointed to relationships being the key in their schools and community. These principals and their respective schools taught and retaught expectations, noting that punishment was not the answer. According to Stephen, leaders must “create the conditions for every human to do their best.” Chad shared that schools need to “enculturate more belonging instead of exclusion.” Howard stated that it is “about teaching and developing understanding about how we function as a community.” According to all of the principals, this takes love, care, and connection. It requires people to listen to one another and be present. All of the elementary principals have embraced a restorative practice to repair harm in relationships. Pamela stated that “the real power is in restorative practices.”

***Words and language build agency and identity.*** Words have power in relationships. According to Fisher et al. (2012) language plays a big part in people’s stories and learning. Schools must ask themselves, is our “school a place where students rediscover, develop, and use their talents, gifts, and natural capacities” (p. 6)? Fisher et al. termed this pillar “choice words.” Elementary principals talked about the power in human interaction, building each other up or tearing them down. Building agency and identity in children was important. Heather

communicated that “people need to be heard, they need to be valued, they need to be listened to.” Elementary principals sought to celebrate and recognize the gifts in their students and the community. They supported and cared for one another. Stories were valued in their community: individual student, staff, and community stories.

***Equity and inclusivity: Ensuring learning for all.*** Fisher et al. termed this pillar “never too late to learn.” The sense of responsibility, intensity, and urgency came into the interviews when the focus of the elementary principals turned to student learning. There was a change in vocal tone in many of the interviews with elementary principals when they began talking about doing what it takes to ensure all students are learning at high levels. Their words became more thoughtful, pauses for reflection longer. There were long and slow releases of breath. There was a real focus on the part of all of the elementary principals interviewed around equity, inclusivity, and an emphasis on the word all. James stated that he wanted his school to be a “model school of how to meet kids’ needs in general education classrooms.” Two of the principals spoke directly to inclusion and equity, while all of the principals talked about ensuring all students were learning at high levels. Stephen stated that schools must “create the conditions for every human to do their best.” Heather shared that her school has “a laser focus on learning,” and they know that “the answer is in the room.” Heather also commented that improved student learning “isn’t something you just go out and buy.” All participants emphasized a growth mindset and a clear purpose on learning. They also emphasized that learning must take place in relationships, with collaboration, communication, connections, and engagement in place. The interviewees included that ensuring that quality instruction is experienced by every child required things such as clear communication, learning, support, and frequently difficult or direct conversations. Lawrence gave several examples of difficult conversations with teachers regarding their instructional



practices and classroom environment. Most of the principals also had a change in vocal tone when sharing examples of difficult conversations about teaching and learning. Where much prior communication was light, there was an intensity that came into play in this part of the interview. There was an urgency that came through in their voice.

All of the principals talked about aspects of student learning in their schools. Two of the elementary principal participants referenced the importance of lesson purpose, gradual release of responsibility, and formative assessment. Two principals talked about small group instruction. Two talked about multi-tiered systems of support and response to intervention. Two other principals talked about the role of professional learning communities and collaborative teams in targeting student learning. Hiring practices were emphasized as key to student learning, ensuring quality teaching and learning. A couple of the elementary principals in the study talked about the teacher evaluation process and classroom observations as tools used to improve learning. All of the elementary principals interviewed shared that it is key for elementary principals to spend time in classrooms.

***Continued improvement for self and school.*** The elementary principals in the study engaged in a focus on continual improvement for themselves and their schools. Reflection served to ensure that they knew where they were as a school community and what they were reaching to achieve. They were all striving to be their best. Fisher et al. termed this pillar “best school in the universe.” The interviews with the elementary principals always concluded with an open-ended question regarding what they were striving for as a school or what their vision of being the best school they could be was. All of the elementary principals paused, smiled, and slowly let the air out of their lungs. The elementary principals in the study engaged in a focus on continual improvement. Reflection served to ensure that they knew where they were as a school

community and what they were reaching for or trying to achieve. Heather shared that “I use any time with my staff to be in a circle, to talk about things that make us strong, things we value in one another, things that are important to us.” The principals were all striving to be their best. They opened to the realities they experienced and hopes for their school. They talked about trauma experiences of students, of poverty, and other challenges they faced. Scott shared that he wants “a school where you can tell people authentically care about kids and one another.” Pamela added, “a place where staff want to be, kids want to be, and all are learning at high levels.” Howard spoke to “forging a better future.” Chad summed it up with “always growing and always getting better.” James acknowledged that “it is not change to change, but changing to get better.” Stephen stated that he desires to “nurture growth in others, to take people where they are at and just keep working to get better and better.”

**Relational and collegial theories of leadership.** Elementary principals in the study applied relational and collegial theories of leadership as they led transformational change and built school culture. They looked to systems and relationships in their leadership. They kept purpose at the forefront and engaged in conversations and dialogue to support growth. They were reflective in their practice. Relationships mattered to them. Aspects of instructional, servant, and transformational theories were all present in the data.

***Instructional leadership theory.*** The instructional leadership theory was applied to some extent by all of the elementary principals interviewed, though it appeared more integrated with the other theories of leadership. These elementary principals did focus on students and learning. They did use data to evaluate impact and learning. The difference was in how they approached staff, students, learning, and data. When they discussed learning and data, there was an emphasis

on supporting teachers and developing a shared understanding of what success looked like. They used the word ‘serve’ frequently.

Several principals shared that the job was so much more than just instructional leadership. Lawrence talked about instructional leadership and shared that the time when they started focusing on instructional leadership was “probably one of the lower elements that I can recall, from a sense of morale. That was a hard one because you felt like you were kind of alone. You couldn’t do it all. It did evolve into more of a distributed leadership, a situational leadership, and more recently teacher leadership.” He shared that this was one of the loneliest times in his career of 40 years. Scott shared a story about moving more towards an instructional style of leadership at the start of the school year, with less focus on relationships and more on the data, teaching, and learning. He described it as a failure. He did not feel effective. He has had to work hard to fix this and it has been hard for him. Mark, too, shared stories from his career where he moved his focus to data and instruction at the expense of relationships. For all of the elementary principals interviewed, it was not one or the other; it was both instruction and relationships. These principals acknowledged the need to focus on learning, measure impact, ensure that all students receive high quality learning in the classroom, but they embraced a different approach to their leadership, one focused on relationships and service.

***Transformational leadership theory.*** Transformational leadership theory also emphasizes relationships. In this theory, the leader creates, communicates, and guides the vision. There is a focus on followers and distributed leadership. The elementary principals interviewed embraced the relationship focus and distributed leadership in the transformational leadership theory. They embodied the listening, presence, and discourse necessary for transformational leadership. At times they engaged in problem solving and inspiring growth. Where these

principals strayed from this theory was in the creation and communication of a vision and their focus on service to staff. They looked to inspiring shared vision and serving staff in their work towards this shared vision. Mark communicated that he didn't believe in transformational leadership. He shared that in his 30 years he has not seen any real transformation. Mark has embraced continual learning and improvement for his school. Though he communicated that he didn't believe in transformational leadership, he has engaged in transformational change. According to artifacts reviewed, Mark has transformed a school labeled as a focus school in the state, one needing significant improvement, to one that has been recognized at the state level for high levels of improvement. This was the only time transformational leadership as a term or theory surfaced in the interviews.

***Servant leadership theory.*** All of the elementary principals interviewed applied servant leadership the most in their role. The terms serve, and servant were prevalent in the interviews. As Greenleaf (1970) shared, a servant leader serves first, and aspires to lead. Stephen shared that "it is a gift that we are allowed to serve in this capacity." James always introduces himself by saying that he "serves as the principal at (school name)." Lawrence wants his staff to know that he is "here for them, to serve them, and support them." Pamela strives to "bring out the best in them (the teachers)." Chad shared that he works to get his teachers what they need. The elementary principals talked about placing the needs of others above their own. All of these principals were focused on the learning and growth of their staff as key in supporting the learning of students. Williams and Jones (2009) shared that a key question associated with servant leadership is "do those served grow?" (p. 32). The interviews captured statements related to this desire for staff to learn and grow. When describing their leadership, the elementary principals interviewed used words like heart, caring deeply, sharing power,

compassion, and deep listening. Two used the words mindfulness and presence. All but one used terms like humble, ego-lite, and humility when talking about their leadership. There was an emphasis on stewardship. They emphasized relationships and authentic dialogue.

### **Field Notes and Observations.**

Field notes were collected during interviews for later analysis, noting the date and time. I recorded context, observations, and other details such as setting, nonverbal behavior, and impressions during the interviews. During interviews, I described vocal tone, impressions, reactions noted, specific words, and notes for follow up. I used rich and thick descriptions in the field notes, ensuring that the notes were thorough and accurate. Field notes provided context associated with the interviews. The field notes provided insight and descriptions for the interviews.

According to the field notes and observations, all of the principals interviewed appeared comfortable and relaxed during the interviews. They sat comfortably, leaning back in their chairs. When a question was asked, a deep breath was taken, their eyes looked up for a moment, and then they began talking. They paused briefly at times and then continued talking. When they talked about their schools, a smile was noted and a pause. It appeared they wanted to fully provide a picture of their school, the community, their staff, and their students. There was a vocal emphasis on words such as caring, students, and relationships. There was a sense of pride in their communication, as noted by nonverbal body language, where they sat up taller and looked more directly into the interviewer's eyes. When the communication turned to student learning, there was an intensity change in tone noted. Their responses were slower, more thought out, and pauses were longer when talking about student learning. These nuances of

nonverbal behavior and vocal tone alerted me and contributed to theme development, noting an emphasis in the interviewee communication.

The offices of the elementary principals interviewed contained pictures of their families. They displayed items that are of interest to them: sports, favorite teams, sailing, and hobbies. There were inspirational messages and words noted in the offices: dream, hope, family, laugh, love, and more. Scott had the words “spark” and “urgency” written on his white board, and he shared during the interview that those words were what he looks for in the staff he hires. All of the principals had shelves with books on leadership and learning. All of the principals had children’s books and three had toys. There were notes from students, staff, and parents displayed along with student art in some of the offices. When I entered Lawrence’s office, he was handwriting birthday cards, which he shared that he hand delivers to students in his school. Scott showed me his filing system that supports his organization, along with the thank you notes he keeps handy to write messages to parents and staff members.

### **Artifacts and Observations**

A review of artifacts, such as handbooks, communications, newsletters, signage, and websites supported an extensive approach to the research and aided in understanding the lived experiences of the elementary principal participants. The lived experience was seen in the words and choices noted in these artifacts. I saw how aspects of the experiences were communicated and described in materials other than the interview alone. When I went into a school office, I served as an outside observer. Observation supported an understanding of context, practices, and culture. Observations acquainted me with the setting. Observations and artifacts supported a well-rounded collection of data for analysis.

When entering a school, I noted signage that would direct the visit, welcome visitors, and orient them to the school. Signage welcomed me as a visitor and made it easy to know where to go. I noted positive words, such as “Welcome!” and “We are glad you are here!” on signage. Safety was prioritized, and visitors were directed into the office to sign in. In every office visited, I was greeted immediately with smiles and was asked how they could help. When I shared that I was there to meet with the principal, they escorted me to the principal’s office. These observations offered triangulation of data for the interviews when principals were asked how someone visiting their school was treated and welcomed. In every case, there was alignment in the data from the interviews and observations. When an elementary principal noted in the interview that being welcoming was important, it was seen in the signage and communication as well. When the elementary principal emphasized gratitude in the interviews, words of gratitude and appreciation were seen in newsletters, communications, and signage.

A review of handbooks, communications, websites, and newsletters supported statements made in the interviews. Words such as thankful, pride, appreciate, grateful, joy, community, and support were frequently seen. Newsletters highlighted celebrations and community events. There were words like “look forward” that were seen in most of the communications and newsletters. Handbooks highlighted shared vision and values. Themes of relationships and community were a thread in the artifacts. Handbooks addressed positive and restorative approaches to behavior and learning. These artifacts supported the data obtained in the interviews with the elementary principals.

### **Summary of Findings**

The described experiences and the daily life of elementary principals were indeed complex. In the interviews, many of the elementary principals referenced how big the job was,

how hard the work was, and how complex the role was. They noted feelings of isolation and loneliness, though being surrounded by people all of the time. These elementary principals appeared to carry the responsibilities and weight of the position on their shoulders, knowing that what they did mattered. As Scott shared, “We have the power to make such a big difference.” The elementary principals realized that they can make a difference in their positions as elementary school principals. They also noted that they cannot do it alone. The elementary principals interviewed in the study valued time with colleagues, being with “somebody else who knows what this job is about,” noted Keith. Several of the elementary principals noted their ability to keep going and persevere, even when things are really tough.

### **Five Key Themes**

Five key themes emerged in the research, providing insight into the experiences of elementary principals, associated skills, knowledge, and behaviors that they employ, and application of relational and collegial leadership. For the elementary principals interviewed in the study, it was about the students first and foremost, people and relationships mattered, leadership was approached through service, purpose, vision, values, and humility were central, and professional learning was ongoing and collaborative. These elementary principals led transformational change and built school culture by creating a welcoming environment, embracing a restorative approach to behavior and discipline, acknowledging that words and language built agency and identity, ensuring equity and inclusivity in learning for all students, and focusing on continued improvement for themselves and their school.

**Theme 1: It is About Students First and Foremost.** The first theme permeated every interview and every interview question: it is about students first and foremost. Scott described himself as “kid focused” and strives for a school that “cares about kids.” Pamela stated that she



had a “heart for kids.” Stephen said that he “loves the kids.” Keith noted his “impact on kids [being] part of a child’s life.” Heather said, “it is about the kids.” Mark has embraced practices and systems to spend time “with kids every single day.” Like most of the elementary principals interviewed, Mark is at recess, in the lunchroom, and in classes daily. James seeks to “prioritize [his] time around kids” and notes that he “likes working with kids.” Lawrence works hard to “know kids by name.” He strives to “serve kids [and] then adults.” Howard wants everyone to know that “kids are truly cared for here.” He wants to support students so that they “contribute positively to their community [and] have the skills to be successful.” Chad stated that “we all want the best for kids, and we care about you, and we are here to listen to you, hear your problems, [and] support your academic development.” It was the students, or kids as the interviewees termed them, that made the job worthwhile and what they loved most about the job. Keith noted the “high-fives and hugs,” while they all commented on loving to interact with students in classrooms, the halls, the lunchroom, and the playground, and watching them learn and grow.

**Theme 2: People and Relationships Matter.** For all of the elementary principals interviewed in the study, everything was experienced in and through relationships. Relationships were at the heart of the work. Lawrence stated, “It is relationships first. The most important thing is the way we connect with one another [in the school].” The elementary principals experienced leadership, professional learning, and their role in connection to others. With value placed on relationships, elementary principals embraced community, collaboration, and engagement with others. Communication and dialogue were key components of supporting relationships. They noted the role family and mentors played in their journey to leadership. Heather talked about the person who hired her, who had confidence in her, saying “I learned so

many things from her that I still do 16 years later.” Stephen talked about his mother who was a high school principal and the conversations they had that guided him. For the elementary principals interviewed, leadership began long before they assumed roles in administration, through relationships with mentors. Principal and administrative mentors played key roles in providing opportunities for leadership and encouraged steps towards the principalship. Scott talked about a “really cool boss, a really wise woman, who was always calm, and nothing ever rattled her. She was his “model for a principal...she was honest about her feelings, she was always consistent and for me as a leader, that has been what I wanted to replicate.”

With this focus on people and relationships, hiring was mentioned by five of the elementary principals interviewed as a priority in their work. Investing principal time in hiring paid off for these elementary principals in the classrooms. Quality teachers in every classroom were something they all sought. Once quality teachers were hired, these elementary principals invested further in the relationship by supporting teacher professional development, learning, leadership, and growth. When people and relationships matter, principals focus on supporting their learning and growth. Stephen shared that it is important to “nurture growth in others, take people where they’re at and just keep working to get better and better.” In addition, many of the principals interviewed highlighted the importance of developing teacher leadership, noting their involvement with district teacher leadership cohorts. The development of teacher leaders created a broader network for leading and supporting staff, students, and community. James talked about his leadership team working to build consensus and commitment in the building. Keith talked about the leadership cohort being “a key component” in approaching change. He was “able to hear their core values, getting them to talk about what was going on for them at school.” According to Keith, the leadership cohort brought a “sense of cohesiveness to rally around

something bigger than themselves.” Leadership teams provided distributed leadership in these elementary schools.

The elementary principals participating in the study experienced their learning and leadership through relationships and community. When they talked about their schools and culture, they emphasized relationships. Relationships mattered in the experiences of these elementary principals.

**Theme 3: Leadership is Approached Through Service.** The elementary principals interviewed were all oriented to service. Serving students, staff, schools, and communities, with several introducing themselves by saying, “I am (James). I serve as the principal at (school name).” Stephen talked about his job being one of service and shared, “it is a gift that we are allowed to serve in this capacity.” Mark stated that “I’m service oriented.” Chad shared that he “really want[s] to help people get to a different place.” He stated that often that requires him to “get them what they need.”

**Theme 4: Purpose, Vision, Values, and Humility are Central.** Purpose and vision were central to the experiences of the elementary principals in the study, with them communicating in the interviews that purpose and vision drive their day to day experiences with students, teachers, and families. The principals connected with the ‘why’ or purpose of their work. They strived to move their schools forward, learning and growing. Keith shared that he works to “build cohesiveness and rally around something bigger.” The elementary principals experienced work towards their vision in their leadership through stewardship and accountability. They worked to create systems within their schools, where students were kept at the center of their vision, where relationships were prioritized, as was high quality teaching and learning.

Interviews with the elementary principals surfaced deep caring and compassion for their work. Values drove their work. They were grateful and appreciative. The elementary principals interviewed communicated that they led with integrity and sought to be authentic in their relationships, and that they were not afraid to be vulnerable with staff and community. They all talked about humility and grace. They referred to themselves as humble, and ego-lite. Eight of the elementary principals expressed the importance of behaviors associated with deep listening, presence, and mindfulness. Seven emphasized listening, three used the term deep understanding, three emphasized presence with others, and two used the term mindfulness. Honesty was mentioned by seven of the principals, five principals spoke of hope, and five principals talked about trust in the interviews.

**Theme 5: Professional Learning is Ongoing and Collaborative.** Influences on the learning of the elementary principals were first contributed to colleagues and mentors. Scott talked about an early mentor in his career who modeled for him the importance of being positive and honest about feelings, “not fake.” Heather pointed out that an early mentor had confidence in her and when she shared that she was thinking about becoming a principal, the mentor said, “What took you so long? I have been secretly ready to pounce.”

Learning happens in relationships. Learning appeared to happen when elementary principals could engage in dialogue with others. These elementary principals noted the work of Peter Senge, Margaret Wheatley, Parker Palmer, William Greenleaf, Doug Fisher, Nancy Frey, Dominique Smith, and the Richard DuFour as a part of their learning. This learning took place through conferences, seminars, readings, and personal conversations. Many of the elementary principals noted their recent work with F.I.T., the pillars, restorative practices, the culture of achievement, experiences visiting Health Sciences High and Middle College (HSHMC) in San

Diego and working closely with Dr. Fisher and Dr. Frey. Recent learning for these principals centered on inclusion and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, through conferences, leadership seminars, principal meetings, readings, and collaborative work with colleagues and their staff. Teacher leadership cohorts and professional development, along with Professional Learning Communities surfaced in dialogue about key learning.

### **Summary**

Five key themes emerged in the research. These key themes provided insight into the experiences of elementary principals, the associated skills, knowledge, and behaviors that they employed, and how they applied relational and collegial leadership. For these elementary principals, it was about the students first and foremost, people and relationships mattered, leadership was approached through service, purpose, vision, values, and humility were central, and professional learning was ongoing and collaborative. They led transformational change and built school culture by creating a welcoming environment, embracing a restorative approach to behavior and discipline, acknowledging that words and language built agency and identity, ensuring equity and inclusivity in learning for all students, and focusing on continued improvement for themselves and their school.

The elementary principals that served as participants in the study experienced their role through relationships and community. They sought to serve in their role and created conditions for students, staff, and community to learn and grow. They prioritized relationships and welcoming, creating community. They valued inclusivity, appreciation for diversity and listening, working to be present and authentic in all of their relationships. They saw power in human interaction that built identity and agency. They valued stories. They worked to ensure that all students were learning at high levels and promoted equity. They recognized that learning

must take place in relationships, prioritizing collaboration, communication, connection, and engagement. They worked to hire the best people that embodied the values and culture of the school and worked to engage collaboratively with others in striving towards the vision of how they best supported learning for the children in their care. They kept purpose at the forefront. Above all, it was about students first and foremost. People and relationships served as a thread through all they did.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter is to present discussion and conclusions for the phenomenological study to better understand how elementary school principals lead transformational change and build school culture. The study data was obtained through interviews, observations, artifacts, and field notes. I sought to understand the skills, knowledge, and behaviors that elementary school principals employed and the organizing practices or overarching ideas that elementary principals who were leading transformational change and building school culture used to describe the daily life of the school, relationships, and individuals. I also sought to understand the relational and collegial theories of leadership--transformational, instructional, and servant leadership--to understand how elementary school principals applied them in their daily work.

This chapter includes discussion and a summary of the results. There is also a discussion of the results in relation to the literature. The limitations of the study, the implications of the results for practice, and recommendations for further research are also included. The chapter ends with a conclusion of the study.

### **Summary of the Results**

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to understand the complexity surrounding the experiences of elementary school principals and how they lead transformational change and build school culture. Specific questions for the research included:

- How do elementary principals who are leading transformational change and building school culture describe their experiences and the daily life of their school and their leadership?

- How do elementary principals describe the associated skills, knowledge, and behaviors that they employ to lead transformational change and build school culture?
- How are the relational and collegial theories of leadership--transformational, instructional, and servant leadership--applied by elementary principals leading transformational change and building school culture?

Qualitative case study research findings in the literature review pointed to the importance of systems, relationships, and interactions, and explained that principals “may represent the single most compelling leverage point” in school improvement (Kershner & McQuillan, 2016, p. 4). The Wallace Foundation (2016), found that school principals were “in the best position to ensure that excellence in teaching and learning...[was] spread throughout the entire school” (p. 10). With principals being a critical factor in bringing about transformational change and building school culture, I sought to understand just how elementary principals experience this phenomenon and how they apply relational and collegial theories of leadership: transformational, servant, and instructional.

Interviews were used as a primary method in this phenomenological research study. Interviews took place in school district offices and conference rooms of the 10 elementary principal participants. All of the participating elementary principals had attended professional development and were implementing the components of F.I.T., which included the culture of achievement. Participants all had more than 15 years in education, had served in leadership positions for at least 11 years, served as elementary principals for eight or more years, had served as an elementary principal at least five years in a single building and at least two years in their current building.



According to the data analysis of the interviews, artifacts, field notes, and observations, elementary principals experienced their role through five key themes, which provided insight into the experiences of elementary principals, the associated skills, knowledge, and behaviors that they employed, and how they applied the theories of relational and collegial leadership. For these elementary principals, it was about the students first and foremost, people and relationships mattered, leadership was approached through service, purpose, vision, values, and humility were central, and professional learning was ongoing and collaborative. They led transformational change and built school culture through these five themes and by applying organizational practices identified by Fisher et al. (2012): creating a welcoming environment, embracing a restorative approach to behavior and discipline, acknowledging that words and language built agency and identity, ensuring equity and inclusivity in learning for all students, and focusing on continued improvement for themselves and their school. Above all, for the elementary principals in the study, it was about students first and foremost. People and relationships served as a thread through all they did. They embraced community, collaboration, and engagement with others through their relationships. “It is relationships first,” stated Lawrence, “the most important thing is the way we connect with one another (in the school).” Communication and dialogue were noted as key skills and behaviors in supporting relationships. Relational and collegial theories of leadership constituted their approach to leading transformational change and building school culture, with an orientation to servant leadership embraced by all of the elementary principals interviewed.

### **Discussion of the Results**

According to Kershner and McQuillan (2016), principals “may represent the single most compelling leverage point” in school improvement (p. 4). The elementary principals interviewed

in this study communicated that they can make a difference in their positions. Scott shared, “We have the power to make such a big difference.” The challenge elementary principals face is the complexity of their role and the many demands placed upon them. They carry the responsibilities as a heavy weight on their shoulders, knowing that what they do matters. Given that what they do matters and that the job is perceived as quite big and the work hard, elementary principals need to embrace distributed leadership, working to grow and support teacher leadership in their buildings. There needs to be an emphasis on creating a shared vision and opportunities for people to come together around that vision.

Elementary principals must focus on what matters. The five key themes provided insight into the experiences of these elementary principals, the associated skills, knowledge, and behaviors that they employed, and how they applied the theories of relational and collegial leadership. These themes also point how elementary principals can lead transformational change and build school culture, by ensuring that it is about the students first and foremost, that people and relationships matter, that leadership is approached through service, that purpose, vision, values, and humility are central, and that professional learning is ongoing and collaborative. Transformational change is lead, and school culture built, by applying the five key themes in their work and by employing organizational practices identified by Fisher et al. (2012): creating a welcoming environment, embracing a restorative approach to behavior and discipline, acknowledging that words and language built agency and identity, ensuring equity and inclusivity in learning for all students, and focusing on continued improvement for themselves and their school. Focusing on what matters is important.

## **Students First and Foremost**

Students matter; it is about students first and foremost. Elementary principals leading transformational change and building school culture need to put students first. Decision making must be focused on what is best for students. Elementary principals must demonstrate that they care about students and embrace practices and systems in order to prioritize their time and focus around students. Elementary principals should spend time at recess, in the lunchroom, and in classes daily with students. Students must be at the center of their work and provide purpose. Elementary principals who put students first and foremost make a difference, lead transformation change, and build school culture. Elementary principals create a community focused on students and learning, the part of their role that they cherish most.

## **People and Relationships Matter**

People and relationships matter. Elementary principals experience every aspect of their role through the lens of relationships. Elementary principals must create systems to ensure that relationships are prioritized. Putting systems in place enables principals to interact with students, staff, and community in meaningful ways. Relationships, interactions, and engagement matters, whether it is through collaboration, dialogue, or professional development. Elementary principals must put their attention to creating a community focused on students and learning. These principals look at learning through the lens of relationships and culture. It is not a matter of choosing between relationships and culture or learning, it is both. As Fisher, Frey, and Pumpian (2012) shared principals cannot focus solely on test scores. The role of an elementary principal requires much more.

## **Leadership Through Relationships and Service**

Leadership through relationships and service matters. Relational and collegial theories of leadership are embraced by elementary principals. Data analysis suggested that the theories of instructional, transformational, and servant leadership appear to be applied situationally and frequently more integrated and fluid. At times, instructional leadership was embraced when focusing on improved student learning and in supervision and evaluation tasks, but always through relationships. At other times, elementary principals embody a transformational leadership approach, using deep listening and discourse, problem solving with staff, and inspiring their growth. These elementary principals interviewed were more oriented to the theory of servant leadership, serving first, with aspirations to lead (Greenleaf, 1970). Stephen stated that “it is a gift that we are allowed to serve in this capacity,” while Lawrence shared that he wants his staff to know that he is “here for them, to serve them, and to support them.” Service was related to growth on the part of staff and students. With this orientation to service, humility is a characteristic of elementary principals embracing servant leadership. Principals who embrace servant leadership and lead with humility do not want or need credit for growth in their schools. Growth is attributed to the work of the staff.

## **Purpose, Vision, Values, and Humility**

Purpose, vision, values, and humility matter. Purpose and vision are key in the experiences of elementary principals. Elementary principals must center their work on their ‘why.’ Students need to be at the center of their work and their purpose. Along with this sense of purpose, values must drive what elementary principals do and why they do it. Principals must reflect on their values and lead with values at the forefront. Aligning purpose, vision, and values is important for elementary principals. They must build trust, lead with compassion, and engage

authentically with their school community. Elementary principals must have a clear vision of their work. They must work with the school community to build a shared mission and vision. When elementary principals focus first and foremost on students and relationships matter, they approach their work and that of their school with humility. They do not lead with a strong ego and are humble in their communications about their work.

### **Relationships and Associated Systemic Organizing Practices**

Relationships and associated systemic organizing practices matter. Fisher et al. (2012) presented five pillars or organizing practices associated with the culture of achievement. Many of the elementary principals interviewed talked about the pillars when they described their experiences as a leader, their own learning, their approach to change, and their vision for their school. Data analysis suggested that relationships should be prioritized, and systemic organizing practices should be embraced by elementary principals leading transformational change and building school culture. When relationships are prioritized, effective elementary principals employ systemic organizing practices such as those identified by Fisher et al. (2012), ensuring that:

- Schools are intentional about being welcoming. The elementary principals were oriented to ensuring that their school was welcoming. As Keith explained, “we want it to be a place of magic for everyone who walks through the door: joy, smiles, kindness.” The elementary principals interviewed had systems in place to ensure that everyone who entered the school felt welcomed.
- Schools create a positive school culture by focusing on both learning and behavior. Fisher et al. (2012) said that schools must “increase the positive behavioral profile of the school in order for teachers to do what they do best” (p. 40). Stephen highlighted

that principals must “create conditions for every human to do their best.” Chad shared that schools need to “enculturate more belonging instead of exclusion” in a school’s approach to behavior and discipline. The elementary principals have embraced a restorative approach to behavior and relationships, emphasizing caring, empathy, and compassion.

- Individuals realize that words have power, building one another up or tearing them down. Elementary principals noted that building agency and identity in children is important. Heather communicated that “people need to be heard, they need to be valued, they need to be listened to.”
- Schools use words such as equity, inclusivity, and an emphasis on the word all, when talking about student learning. Stephen shared that leaders must “create the conditions for every human to do their best.” The elementary principals emphasized that learning must take place in relationships, with collaboration, communication, connection, and engagement in place. Agreements around quality teaching amongst staff included purpose, gradual release of responsibility, and formative assessment. These principals and their schools have embraced a Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) and inclusive approach to learning, which require teams of teachers working collaboratively. Principals value time in classrooms, supporting this work with their teachers and students.
- Schools come together and embrace continual improvement and growth. They reflect together, engage in authentic dialogue and strive together. Heather shared, “I use any time with my staff to be in a circle, to talk about things that make us strong, things we

value in one another, things that are important to us.” Chad emphasized that his school “is always growing and always getting better.”

### **Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature**

The discussion of the results in relation to the literature keys into three foci: relating to the community of practice, the literature, and the community of scholars. When I look at the results in relation to the community of practice, influences are noted. These elementary principals interviewed belong to a single school district in the Pacific Northwest. Community and district values are embedded in relationships, priorities, and practices. This district has stated values around relationships and service. Hiring and professional development are tied to those values. Variations do appear, since all of the elementary principals interviewed had extensive experiences in other school districts. The draw to this district for most was in the stated values.

The results relate to much of the literature in the Chapter 2 literature review. Fisher et al. (2012) stated that “the collective power of a school community that turns its attention to building a culture of achievement cannot be underestimated” (p. 3). In that statement, relationships surfaced through the terms collective and community. Collaboration is at the heart of the work with culture and relationships are woven into the work. Relationships matter.

The results also relate to the importance of the role of elementary principals in the literature. Prevalent in the literature was the notion that in elementary schools across the nation, principals serve a pivotal role in bringing about transformational change and building school culture (Fisher, Frey, & Hattie, 2016; Hattie, 2015; Kershner & McQuillan, 2016; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Wallace Foundation, 2016).

## **Limitations**

Research conditions can result in limitations in any study. In this phenomenological study, I sought to understand how elementary principals lead transformational change and build school culture. The interviews were conducted in a single district and only at the elementary school level. Using a single school district for sampling could be considered a limiting factor. The results are tied to the experiences of these elementary principals included in the study.

## **Implications of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory**

Results in a phenomenological study are not readily generalizable. Context, in a phenomenological study, controls aspects of implication for results and data. Results are however transferable. With transferability, the results serve as a model for elementary principals who desire to lead transformational change and build school culture.

This study sought to understand the meaning of the complexity surrounding the experiences of elementary principals, building understanding around how they describe their daily life of school, along with how they lead transformational change and build school culture. The study also sought to understand the associated skills, knowledge, and behaviors that elementary principals employ and how the relational and collegial theories of transformational, instructional, and servant leadership are applied by elementary principals. According to Taylor et al. (2007), information in the literature was less clear about how elementary principals applied these leadership theories. The results in this study indicated that the elementary principals in the sample population adopted a balanced and integrated approach to theory implementation. They were more fluid in their application of the theories of leadership. Though they were more oriented to service, sharing power, and caring deeply, they also sought to inspire staff and growth. These principals also focused on student learning. Hattie (2015) indicated that there



was a stronger impact of instructional leadership in schools, though this study did find that this cannot be at the expense of relationships. Relationships are key in leading transformational leadership and building school culture. Findings would imply that elementary principals employed a more fluid, balanced, and integrated approach, applying the servant, transformational, and instructional theories of leadership more situationally. Per Dr. Fisher (personal communication, January 16, 2017), there was less information available for elementary principals about creating a culture of achievement. Fisher and Frey (2015) reported that attention must be on both school culture and academic press in order to build a culture of achievement. The five pillars they use to describe a culture of achievement at their school, Health Sciences High and Middle College (HSHMC), surfaced in the interviews with the elementary principals, though not labeled as such. This study surfaced information on how F.I.T. and the five pillars worked at the elementary level. The study confirmed that the five pillars, when applied in elementary schools, supported the elementary principal in leading transformational change and building school culture. Values clearly drive the work of elementary principals. Purpose is kept at the forefront of their work. Elementary principals work to ensure that their schools are welcoming, that their schools are focused on relationships, building a positive school climate, where a restorative approach was used to “increase the positive behavior profile of the school” (Fisher et al., 2012). Elementary principals realize that there is power in human interactions and words. When talking about learning, elementary principals emphasize equity and inclusivity, creating conditions to support learning for all. Elementary principals embody striving for continual improvement and ongoing learning. They approach all of this with humility and compassion. The complexity of their role can only be managed through relationships in the organization and a focus on community.

Findings would imply that elementary principals should employ a more fluid, balanced, and integrated approach to leadership: applying the servant, transformational, and instructional theories of leadership more situationally. The results of this study, specifically the five key themes and the organizing principals could potentially serve as a model for elementary principals seeking to lead transformational change and build school culture.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Further research on the relational and collegial theories of leadership and how they can be applied by elementary principals in a balanced and integrated manner would serve to expand the understanding in this study. For further research, the study could be conducted in the same district, but include secondary principals. Similarly, an extension of this study to a different district or geographical area would be useful to see if the results would be similar or different. One variable to add to the investigation would be to explore the responses of participating principals compared to their district values and mission statements.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to understand the complexity surrounding the experiences of elementary school principals and how they lead transformational change and build school culture. The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to understand the complexity surrounding the experiences of elementary school principals and how they lead transformational change and build school culture. Specific questions for the research included:

- How do elementary principals who are leading transformational change and building school culture describe their experiences and the daily life of their school and their leadership?

- How do elementary principals describe the associated skills, knowledge, and behaviors that they employ to lead transformational change and build school culture?
- How are the relational and collegial theories of leadership--transformational, instructional, and servant leadership--applied by elementary principals leading transformational change and building school culture.

The study found that elementary principals who are leading transformational change and building school culture described their experiences and the daily life of their school and their leadership by talking about relationships. Relationships mattered. For all of the elementary principals interviewed, their purpose was clear; it was all about the students. It was the students who made the job worthwhile and what they loved most about the job. Relationships were at the heart of their work.

The study found that elementary principals described the associated skills, knowledge, and behaviors that they employed to lead transformational change and build school culture related to relationships. They emphasized connections with one another in the school setting. They placed value on relationships, and embraced community, collaboration, and engagement with others. Communication and dialogue were key. Purpose and vision were central to their experiences. They led with deep caring and compassion, with values driving their work. They talked about humility and grace, referring to themselves as humble. They practiced deep listening, presence, and mindfulness. Their attention was on creating a community focused on students and learning. They embraced a systems approach to prioritizing relationships, culture, and school community in order to support learning and growth. They had systems in place to ensure that everyone who entered their schools felt welcomed and created conditions to support

community and learning. These elementary principals were continually striving to be the best they could be. They were reflective and kept purpose at the forefront of their work.

The study found that the relational and collegial theories of leadership--transformational, instructional, and servant leadership--were applied by the elementary principals interviewed in a balanced and integrated manner. Though they were more oriented to service, sharing power, and caring deeply, they also sought to inspire staff and growth. These elementary principals also focused on student learning. Relationships were key in leading transformational leadership and building school culture. Findings in this study pointed to a fluid, balanced, and integrated approach to the theories, applying the servant, transformational, and instructional theories of leadership more situationally, rather than a singular approach. Though Hattie (2015) indicated that there was a stronger impact of instructional leadership in schools, this study found that the application of a specific theory of leadership cannot be applied at the expense of relationships. Dewitt (2018) pointed out that there is some criticism of Hattie's work, since the influences are averages and "there is much more to the story" (p. 11). Applying the theories in a fluid, balanced, or integrated manner, with a focus on relationships, best served these elementary principals in leading transformational leadership and building school culture.

The words of the elementary principals interviewed sum it up best. Scott shared, "We have the power to make such a big difference." Stephen added, "It is a gift that we are allowed to serve in this capacity." Keith pointed out, "we want it (his school) to be a place of magic for everyone who walks through the door: joy, smiles, kindness. We want them to like being here and know we love them. Relationships matter. We must nurture the growth in others." Heather added, "people need to be heard, they need to be valued, they need to be listened to." Paula summed it up saying that she wants her school to be "a place where staff want to be, kids want to

be, and all are learning at high levels.” Elementary principals lead transformational change and build school culture by prioritizing relationships with students, staff, and community. They embrace a balanced and collaborative approach to their leadership.

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## **Appendix A: Statement of Original Work**

The Concordia University-Portland Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously-researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local education contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University-Portland Academic Integrity Policy. The policy states the following:

### **Statement of academic integrity.**

As a member of the Concordia University-Portland community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

### **Explanations:**

#### **What does “fraudulent” mean?**

“Fraudulent” work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one’s own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics, and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate’s final work without full and complete documentation.

#### **What is “unauthorized” assistance?**

“Unauthorized assistance” refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another’s work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

## Statement of Original Work

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University-Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.
2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of the dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*.

Tamera Sue Jones  
Digital Signature

Tamera Sue Jones  
Name (Typed)

April 18, 2018  
Date



## **Appendix B: Consent Form**

Concordia University–Portland Institutional Review Board  
Approved: November 16, 2017; will Expire: November 14, 2018

### **CONSENT FORM**

<b>Research Study Title:</b>	Leading Transformational Change and Building School Culture
<b>Principal Investigator:</b>	Tamera Jones
<b>Research Institution:</b>	Concordia University
<b>Faculty Advisor:</b>	Dr. John Mendes

#### **Purpose and what you will be doing:**

The purpose of this interview and research is to better understand how elementary school principals successfully lead transformational change and build school culture. It is anticipated that findings will include the skills, knowledge, and behaviors that they must employ. It will seek to understand the organizing practices or overarching ideas that elementary principals who are leading transformational change and building school culture use to describe the daily life of the school, relationships and individuals. It will also study the relational and collegial theories of leadership; transformational, instructional and servant leadership and restorative practices to learn effective approaches for educational leaders.

I expect approximately 10-15 practicing school principals will participate in this study. No one will be paid to be in the study. I will begin enrollment on November 17, 2017 and end enrollment by February, 2017. Participants will participate in an interview with the Principal Investigator that should take approximately an hour of your time. In addition, any artifacts (newsletters, handbooks or documents) that you feel would aid in this understanding are appreciated. I am also interested in experiences you have observed that may further add understanding.

#### **Risks:**

I will record interviews. The recordings will be transcribed by the investigator, and the recording will be deleted when the transcription is completed. Any data you provide will be coded so people who are not the investigator cannot link your information to you. Any name or identifying information you give will be kept securely via electronic encryption or locked inside the cabinet in my office. The recording will be deleted as soon as possible; all other study documents will be kept secure for 3 years and then be destroyed.

**Benefits:**

Information you provide will help us learning how elementary school principals successfully lead transformational change and build school culture. It is anticipated that the study data will identify the skills, knowledge, and behaviors that elementary principals must employ. It will also identify the organizing practices and overarching ideas that elementary principals who are leading transformational change and building a culture of achievement use to describe the daily life of the school, relationships, and individuals. You could benefit from the findings; gaining potential insight into the skills, knowledge, and behaviors that ensure high levels of learning in your schools for all students, and the organizing practices and overarching ideas that elementary principals who are leading transformational change and building school culture use to inform their practice.

**Confidentiality:**

This information will not be distributed to any other agency and will be kept private and confidential. The only exception to this is if you tell us abuse or neglect that makes us seriously concerned for your immediate health and safety.

**Right to Withdraw:**

Your participation is greatly appreciated, but I acknowledge that the questions I am asking are personal in nature. You are free at any point to choose not to engage with or stop the study. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. This study is not required and there is no penalty for not participating. If at any time you experience a negative emotion from answering the questions, I will stop asking you questions and ask if you want to continue.

**Contact Information:**

You will receive a copy of this consent form. If you have questions you can talk to or write the principal investigator, Tamera Jones [Researcher email redacted] or call [Researcher phone redacted]. If you want to talk with a participant advocate other than the investigator, you can write or call the director of our institutional review board, Dr. OraLee Branch (email [obranche@cu-portland.edu](mailto:obranche@cu-portland.edu) or call 503-493-6390).

**Your Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. I asked questions if I had them, and my questions were answered. I volunteer my consent for this study.

_____	_____
Participant Name	Date
_____	_____
Participant Signature	Date
_____	_____
Investigator Name	Date
_____	_____
Investigator Signature	Date



Investigator: Tamera Jones; email: [tammy.jones@xxxxxxx](mailto:tammy.jones@xxxxxxx)  
c/o: Professor Dr. John Mendes;  
Concordia University–Portland  
2811 NE Holman Street  
Portland, Oregon 97221

## Appendix C: Interview Protocol

**Interviewer:** Tamera Jones

**Interviewee:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Pseudonym Assigned:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

### Introductory Protocol

I want to thank you for your willingness to participate in this research study. In this study, I seek to better understand how elementary school principals lead transformational change and build school culture. The study seeks to understand the skills, knowledge, and behaviors that elementary principals employ, along with gaining understanding of the organizing practices or overarching ideas that elementary principals who are leading transformational change and building school culture use to describe the daily life of the school, relationships and individuals. I am also interested in learning more about how theories of leadership are applied by elementary principals.

I believe that you have valuable insight to contribute to this study. To ensure that I capture your insight, I would like to audio record this interview. If you are willing to participate and agree to the audio recording, I need your consent. After the interview, I will transcribe the audio recording. I will ask you to engage in member checking, a process where you will read the transcript and ensure that the transcription accurately describes what you shared in the interview. After this process, the audio recording will be erased. Pseudonyms will be used instead of your actual name in the study to protect your privacy. In addition, your actual school district will not be identified either. All information shared is confidential and your participation is voluntary. You may discontinue your participation at any time. This is the consent form. Please read it and sign if you agree to participate in the study.

## **Interview Questioning Protocol**

(Semi-structured interviews target the research questions in the study. The interview contains main questions, probes, and follow-up. Probes are used for clarification and elaboration.)

### **1. Please describe your experiences as a school leader?**

Probes (as necessary):

How long have you served in leadership positions in schools?

How long have you served in your current school as a principal?

What is your favorite part of being a principal?

### **2. Please describe your own professional learning around leading transformational change and building school culture. What has that experience been like for you? How have those experiences influenced you?**

Probes (as necessary):

What has your learning entailed (institutes, professional development, seminars, workshops, book studies, visitations,...)?

What was most valuable in supporting your learning?

As a result of your learning, what have you done to lead transformational change and build school culture?

What results have you noticed as a result of your learning and leadership around school culture?

### **3. How would you describe yourself as a leader?**

Probes (as necessary):

What is your favorite part of being a principal?

What values or beliefs drive your leadership?

What do you hold sacred as a leader?

What would you say is your key mission or purpose?

What are you trying to achieve?

What are some of your key skills, behaviors and/or knowledge?

How do you approach change?

When you reflect on your leadership, what would you say your focus is on (service to followers, the organization/school, learning)? Are there times or situations where this varies?

4. How would you describe your school?

Probes (as necessary):

Culture

How would you describe your school culture?

What are some of the (procedures, practices, processes, structures, routines) a visitor to your school would see or experience that exemplified your school culture?

What have you done to build your school culture?

How are your school mission, values and beliefs reflected in your school culture?

How would you describe relationships in your school between you and your staff, between staff members, between staff and students, and between students?

Welcoming

How is a visitor or parent greeted upon arrival and how would they describe their experiences in your school? How would you describe your efforts with welcoming guests?

What routines and practices do you have in place to welcome new staff, families and students into your culture?

#### Do No Harm

How do you approach behavior, rules and discipline?

How do the behaviors of staff and students serve as exemplars of your culture and mission?

What prevention practices are employed/How do you teach positive behaviors and interactions with students?

When harm is done by staff or students or behavior does not match expectations, how is this handled?

#### Choice Words

What is the tone set by adults in the school?

How are words and language used to promote student identity and agency?

How do you support a growth mindset in your students?

#### Never Too Late To Learn

How does your school culture support the learning for all students?

What practices are embedded in classroom learning as a result of your school culture?

When students struggle with learning, how does your school culture support their learning?

#### Best School in The Universe

What are you striving for or reaching for as a school?

What is your vision for being the best school you can be?

How do you engage in continual growth and renewal, sustaining and enhancing your school culture?

### **Closing Protocol**

I want to thank you for your time today and your willingness to participate in this research study.

The insights you shared in the interview will to contribute greatly to this study. I will transcribe the audio recording and will then ask you to engage in member checking, a process where you will read the transcript and ensure that the transcription accurately describes what you shared in the interview. After this process, the audio recording will be erased. Pseudonyms will be used instead of your actual name in the study to protect your privacy. In addition, your actual school district will not be identified either. All information shared is confidential and your participation is voluntary.

As we close our interview, I want to give you the opportunity to share anything else that you feel would inform this study into how elementary school principals lead transformational change and build school culture.

Thank you once again



## Appendix D: Elementary Principal Experience Data Collection Form

**Interviewer:** Tamera Jones

**Interviewee:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Pseudonym Assigned:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Years in Education: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Years in Educational Leadership Roles: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Years as an Elementary Principal: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Buildings Served as an Elementary Principal: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Years in Building #1 \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Years in Building #2 \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Years in Building #3 \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Years in Building #4 \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Years in Building #5 \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Years in Building #6 \_\_\_\_\_

Attended FIT Training: Yes or No

## Appendix E: Summary of Elementary Principal Participant Experiences in Education

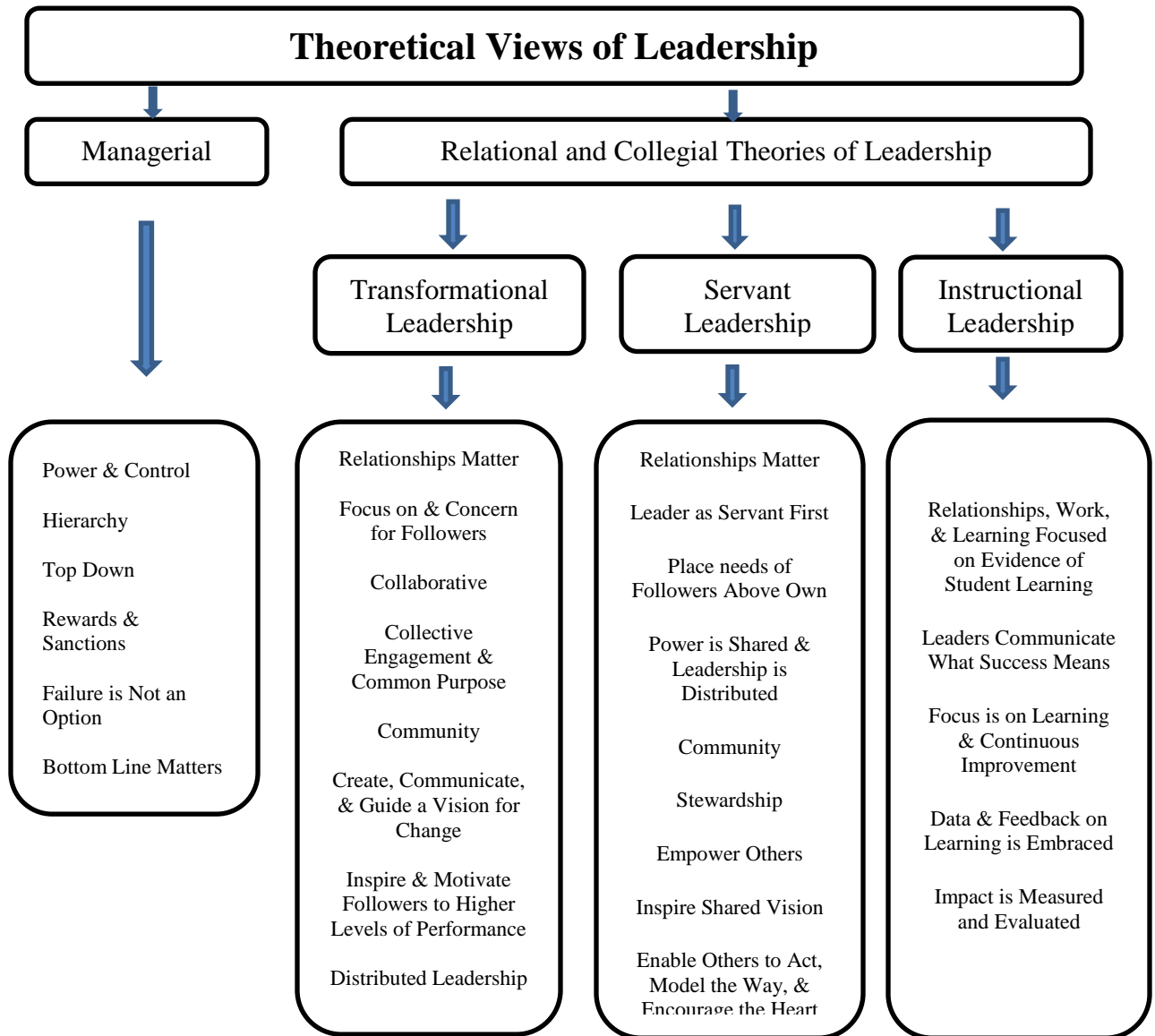
Table 1

*Summary of Elementary Principal Participant Experiences in Education*

Elementary Principal Participants										
	Scott	Mark	Lawrence	Pamela	James	Howard	Chad	Heather	Keith	Stephen
Yrs. In Education	15	30	40	36	22	27	28	25	29	18
Yrs. In Leadership	11	24	35	31	22	21	23	18	21	17
Years as an Elementary Principal	8	17	31	26	15	17	20	16	16	12
Yrs. In each Bldg.										
Bldg. 1	3	2	2	2	7	15	6	2	1	1
Bldg. 2	5	7	1	1	1	2	14	14	4	11
Bldg. 3		3	7	7	7				10	
Bldg. 4		5	10	16					2	
Bldg. 5			7							
Bldg. 6			4							
Attended FIT Training?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

*Note.* Yrs = Years and Bldg. = Building

## Appendix F: Theoretical Views of Leadership



*Figure 1.* Theoretical views of leadership. This figure illustrates the theoretical views of leadership, comparing management versus the collegial and relational theories of transformational, servant, and instructional leadership summarized from the literature (Crippen (2004, 2005); Fisher et al. (2016); Greenleaf (1970); Hattie (2015); Kershner et al. (2016); Marzano et al. (2005); Taylor et al. (2007); Williams et al. (2009)).